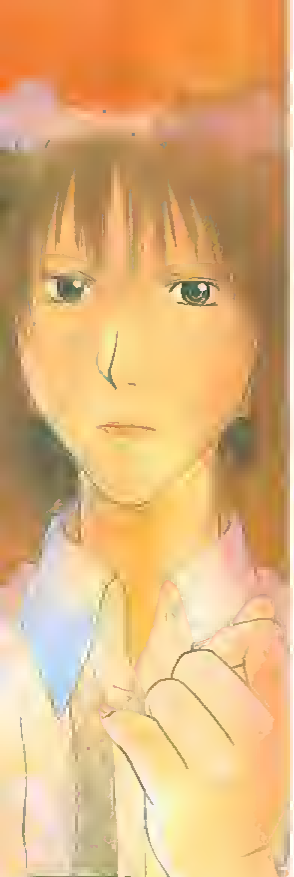
アフタヌーンKC

五年生

"The 5th Grade"

Sono Yoshino & Shimo Akio.
The Story is close to you.



木尾士目

Kio Shimoku

3

Parents, Friends' Future,
Their Relationship ……
They haven't reached
the conclusion about them.
It's a painful and distressed youth.

五年生

木尾士目

The 5th Grade

3

Chapter 13	*The Palm of My Hand*
Chapter 14	*Hearts Laid Bare I*
Chapter 15	*Hearts Laid Bare II*
Chapter 16	*That Predictable Sense of Distance, and the Absence of Thought*
Chapter 17	*Separate Rooms*
Chapter 18	*Those Good Old Days (Always the Same Trap)*
	Things I Still Don't Know

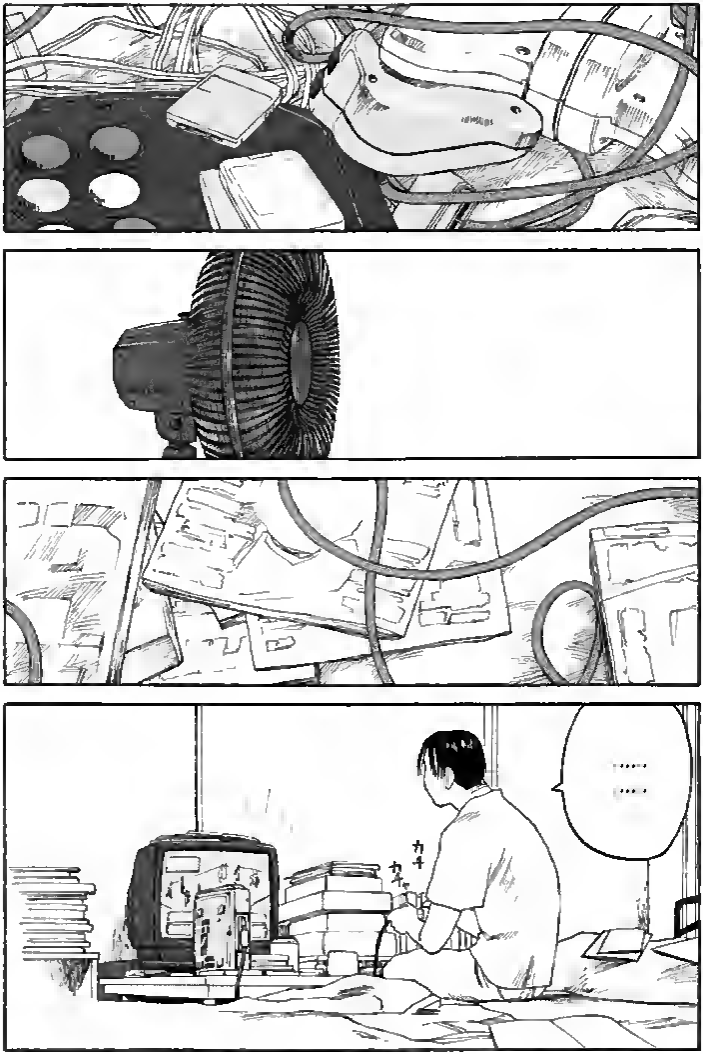
五年生

"The 5th Grade"
Soma Yoshino & Shima Akio. The Story is close to you

3

Kio Shimoku

Chapter 13
The Palm of My Hand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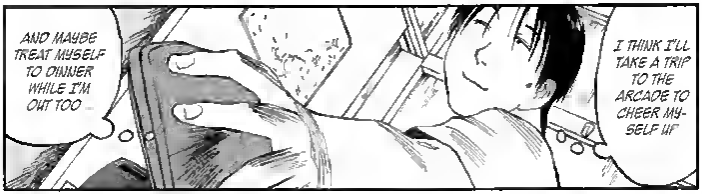
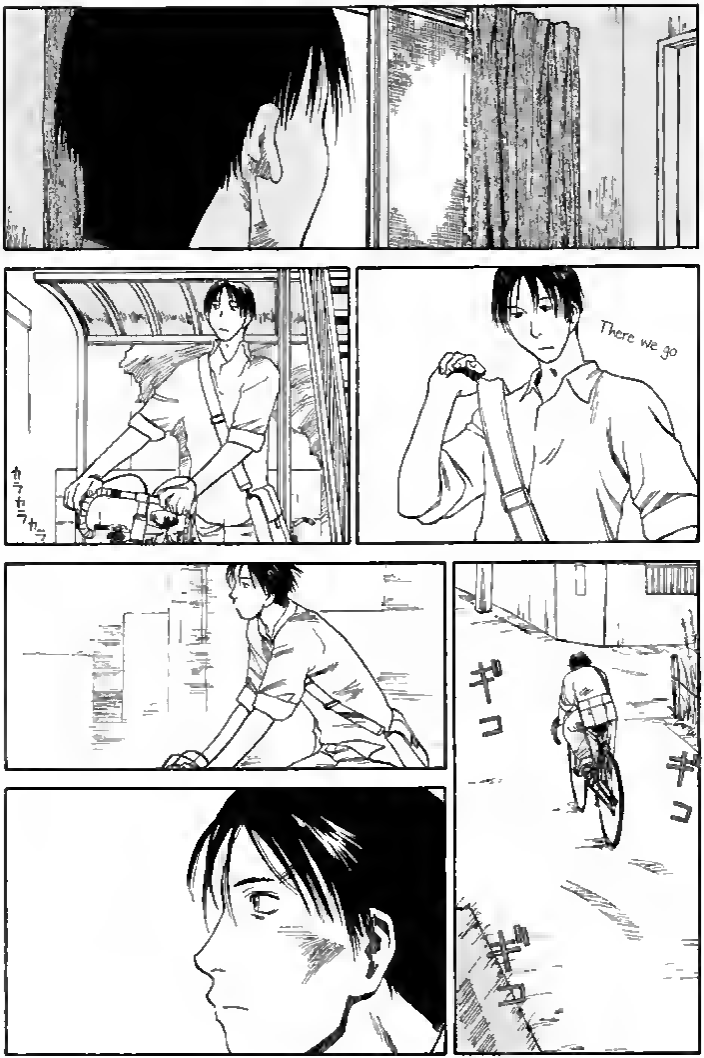
NAH, I HAVE ANOTHER PARTY MEMBER AT 98, SO I'LL GET HIM TO 99 AND SAVE THEN
SHOULD I SAVE FOR NOW?
HELL YEAH, LEVEL 99!
SHIT, DID IT OVER-HEAT?!
FUCKIN' SERI-OUSLY?!
CHK-CHAK
RIGHT IN FRONT OF A SAVE POINT?! GIMME MY FIVE HOURS BACK, YOU PIECE OF SHIT GAME!!
It's my fault for not saving but still!
WHAT THE FUCK?! AGAIN?!

ばたっ
MAN, THOUGH. WITHOUT YOSHINO I FEEL LIKE I'M JUST LOSING CONTROL OF MY LIFE...
SHIT, MAN I CAN'T KEEP UP A GAMING MARATHON IN THIS KINDA HEAT
I MISS YOSHINO'S PLACE, AND YOSHINO'S AIR CONDITIONER...
I never played games there but still

THIS'S GOOD TOO, IN ITS OWN WAY
NAH


AND MAYBE TREAT MYSELF TO DINNER WHILE I'M OUT TOO...
I THINK I'LL TAKE A TRIP TO THE ARCADE TO CHEER MYSELF UP

And naturally,
summer came
to an end.


There we go
カラセラカラ
ギコ
ギコ
ギコ

I'M FEELING PRETTY GOOD LATELY FOR SOME REASON
LIKE, CALMER THAN I WAS BEFORE MORE AT PEACE
I WONDER WHY. IS IT 'CAUSE I'VE SETTLED INTO A ROUTINE?
ONE THAT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE IT'S GONNA CHANGE MUCH IN THE NEAR FUTURE
ONCE I GRADUATE I'LL TAKE SOME MORE PART-TIME JOBS
AND SEE YOSHINO FROM TIME TO TIME
AND SHE SAYS SHE MIGHT EVEN HAVE TIME FOR A DATE SOON
YOSHINO CALLS ME PRETTY OFTEN THESE DAYS JUST TO TELL ME HOW SHE'S BEEN,

OH, HEY, YOSHINO WHAT'S UP?
HELLO? SHIMA AKIO SPEAKING
RRRR
LET'S GO ON A DATE ♡

DUNNO WHY WE HAVE TO PAY TO GO WALKING IN THE PARK
OH COME ON IT'S JUST 200 YEN
WELL, I JUST THOUGHT
AND IT KEEPS THE WEIRDOS OUT.
I GUESS BUT WHY D YOU WANNA MEET AT A PARK?
YOU CAN EVEN GO INTO THE GREEN-HOUSE It's pretty nice

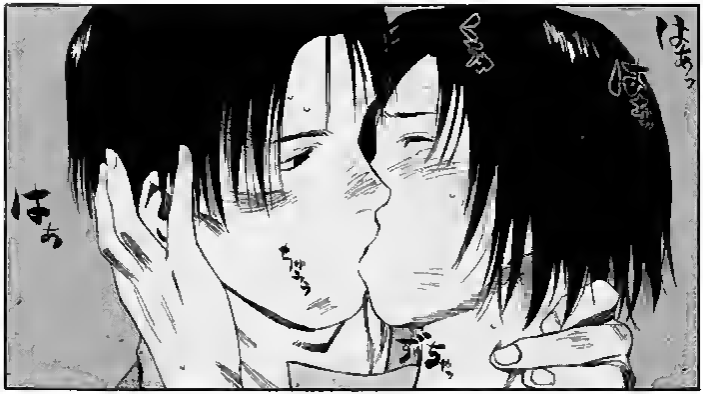
...WE COULD TAKE OUR TIME TODAY, IS ALL
HMM...
WELL, I MEAN... I WAS JUST HOPING, IF WE HAD THE TIME
ERR, I MEAN, NOT THAT WE HAVE TO OR ANYTHING, BUT...
MMM
OH, DON'T TRY TO PLAY IT COOL THERE'LL BE PLENTY OF TIME FOR SEX LATER SO DON'T WORRY
I'M NOT REALLY THE TYPE TO CARE ABOUT BUILDING UP A ROMANTIC MOOD THROUGHOUT THE DAY. WE CAN JUST SET ASIDE SOME TIME FOR IT AND BE FINE...
THEN LET'S NOT?
ERR, I DIDN'T MEAN IT THAT WAY...

IT'S JUST, SOMETIMES YOU SEEM TO REALLY HATE SEX, AND OTHER TIMES YOU'RE TOTALLY FINE WITH IT...
Y KNOW, I DON'T THINK I'LL EVER GET A FEEL FOR THAT PART OF YOU.
HUH?
WELL, WHEN IT COMES TO ME,
I'M ALWAYS READY, Y'KNOW?
OH... OKAY
WELL PEOPLE CAN'T BE THE SAME ALL THE TIME AKIO
HMM
DON'T YOU THINK SO?
SO YOU NEVER REALLY WANT IT, HUH?
WHAT?
MMM...
FOR ME SOMETIMES I CAN'T HELP BUT FEEL LIKE WE'RE DOING SOMETHING WRONG AND CAN'T GET THAT OUT OF MY HEAD.
AND OTHER TIMES I JUST SHRUG AND THINK, "WELL WHATEVER."
It's not like one or two more times will change anything

NOT OFTEN, BUT I DO.
...I DO.
Hahaha

YEAH, SHE WAS LIKE THAT A FEW TIMES BACK IN KISARAZU TOO...
I still cherish those memories
Shit! Down, boy
HOW ABOUT WE WALK A CIRCLE AROUND THE PARK AND THEN CALL IT?
I DUNNO, I THINK WE COULD SPEND A LITTLE MORE TIME HERE
WELL, WHAT NOW?
WANT TO LEAVE?
HMM?
HUH?
THERE YOU GO AGAIN WITH THE ACTING
NO, NEVER MIND I DON'T CARE

THAT'S NOT WHAT YOU WERE SAYING EARLIER
I KIND OF LIKE THAT PART OF YOU
HEHEH
I DON'T GET YOU SOME-TIMES
BUT IT'S SOMETHING I TELL YOU ALL THE TIME ISN'T IT?
HAHA, YOU'RE RIGHT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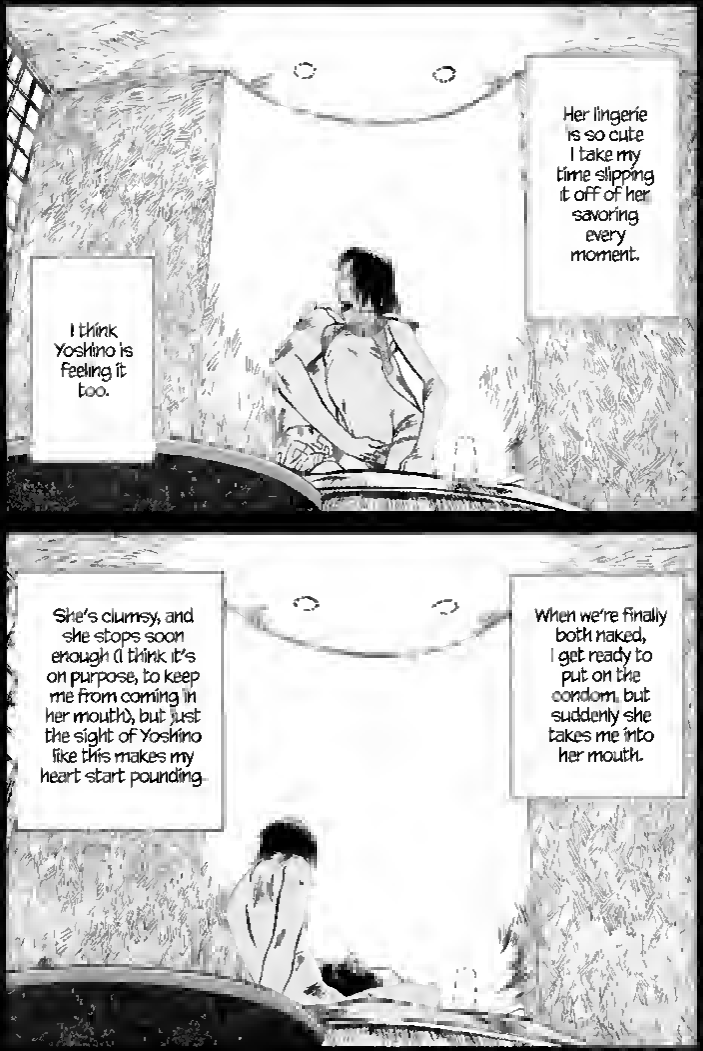
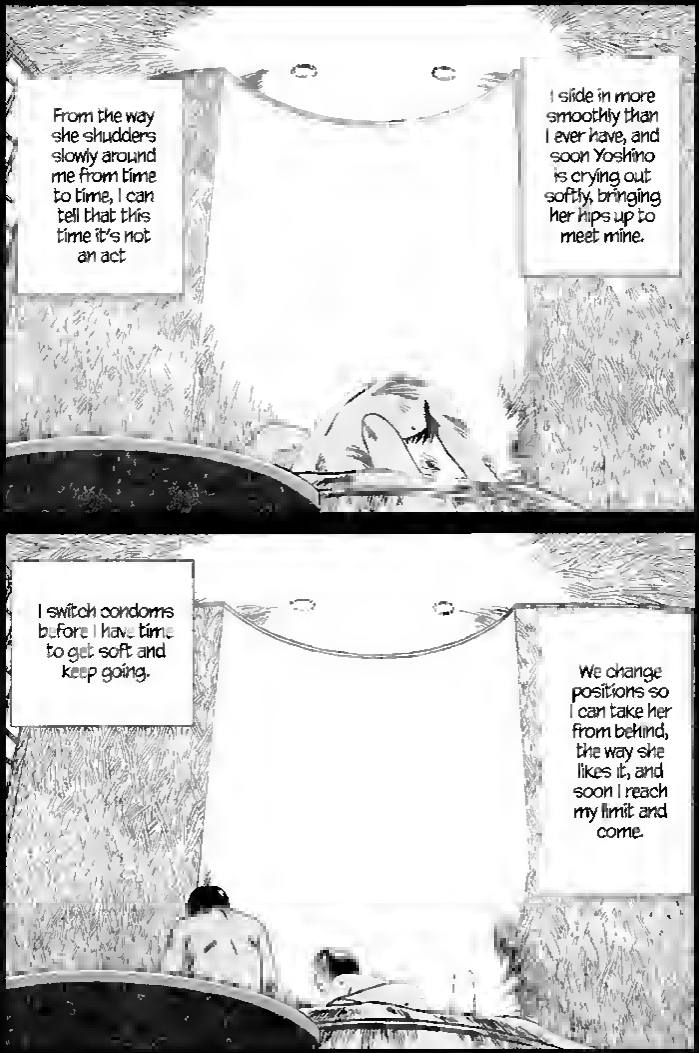
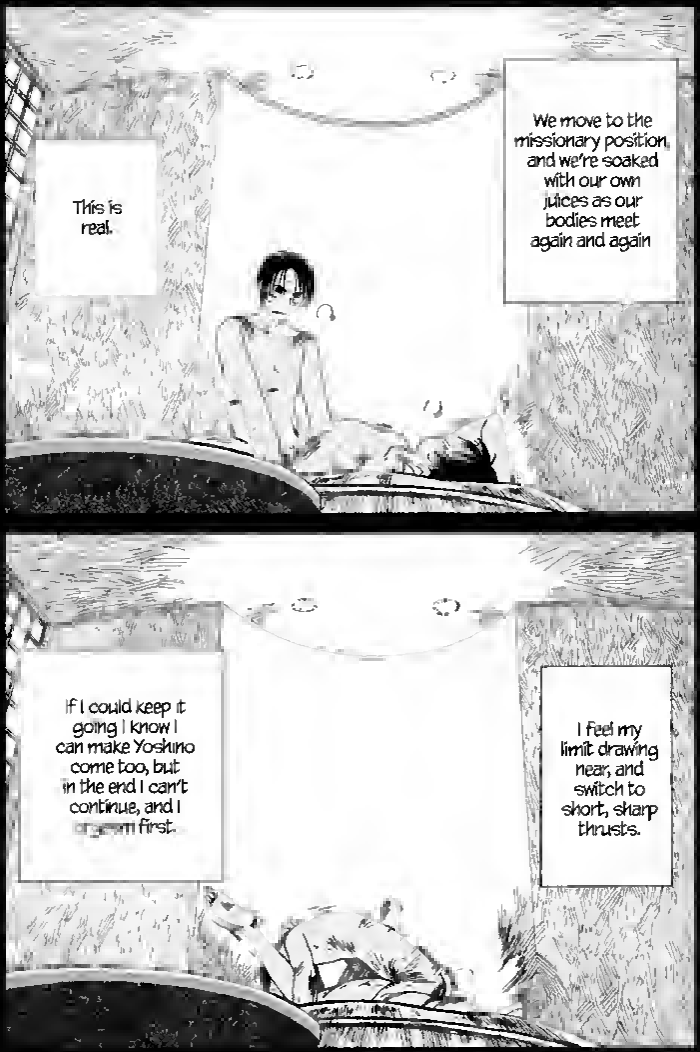
ぴとっ
ぴちゃ
ぺろ
Ah
HMM... YOU'RE KINDA DIFFERENT TODAY
YOU FEEL SORTA EAGER?
REALLY?
I DON'T KNOW, I THINK I WAS LIKE THIS MOST OF THE TIME BACK IN KISARAZU
WELL, I GUESS

YUP!
DOES THAT MAKE YOU HAPPY?
HMH, REALLY?
WELL, THIS IS THE REASON I CAME HERE TODAY, ANYWAY
WOOOW
LOOK, I EVEN DRESSED UP A LITTLE
HEY
MIND IF I TAKE A CLOSER LOOK?♡


Her lingerie is so cute I take my time slipping it off of her savoring every moment.
I think Yoshino is feeling it too.
When we're finally both naked, I get ready to put on the condom, but suddenly she takes me into her mouth.
She's clumsy, and she stops soon enough (I think it's on purpose, to keep me from coming in her mouth), but just the sight of Yoshino like this makes my heart start pounding.


From the way she shudders slowly around me from time to time, I can tell that this time it's not an act
I slide in more smoothly than I ever have, and soon Yoshino is crying out softly, bringing her hips up to meet mine.
I switch condoms before I have time to get soft and keep going.
We change positions so I can take her from behind, the way she likes it, and soon I reach my limit and come.


This is real.
We move to the missionary position, and we're soaked with our own juices as our bodies meet again and again
If I could keep it going I know I can make Yoshino come too, but in the end I can't continue, and I [illegible] first.
I feel my limit drawing near, and switch to short, sharp thrusts.

ぎゅう
はぁ？
はぁ？
はぁ？
WHEW
……
……
STAY
OKAY
ばふ

AH
YOU SHOULD TAKE CARE OF THE CONDOM
OH YEAH, YOU'RE RIGHT
WHAT IS IT?
NOTHING
HAND ME A TISSUE?
KAY
Whew
My hands are shaking
MAN, WE REALLY DID IT A LOT TO-DAY
MHMM
Ewww even the sheets're soaked

HAHA
IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE I FELT LIKE A WOMAN
HEHEH
When
YEAH, GUESS SO
WELL, IT CAN WAIT WE'VE STILL GOT TIME
WHAT?
I WANT TO TAKE A SHOWER NOW

ALRIGHT ♡
LET'S TAKE ONE TOGETHER LATER! ♡
I WONDER IF THING RE GOING TO BE LIKE THIS FOR US FOR A WHILE
I GUESS I'M FINE WITH THAT
SEEMS LIKE IT?
ME? WELL... SAME AS EVER, I GUESS
NOTHING S CHANGED FOR ME.
WHAT ABOUT YOU?
SO, HOW S THE STUDYING GOING?
ALRIGHT. I GUESS I'M TRYING TO STEP IT UP LITTLE BY LITTLE
You finally asked

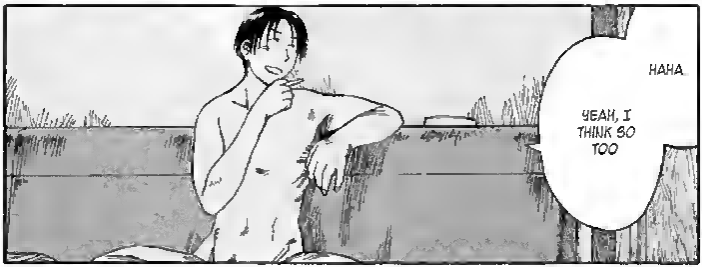
MIND IF I HAVE A SMOKE?
NOT IN BED
GO SMOKE ON THE SOFA IF YOU HAVE TO
HMPH, FINE
HEHEH
どぉ
WOW YOU JUST FLOPPED ONTO THAT SOFA LIKE A RAG DOLL
HAHA

HMM?

WHAT?
MAN, THINGS RE GOOD RIGHT NOW
I WAS JUST THIN-KING
NO-THIN'
WHAT?
I'VE JUST BEEN FEELING PRETTY GOOD LATELY, IS ALL
I MEAN NOTHING MUCH S CHANGED, BUT FOR SOME REASON I JUST FEEL MOTIVATED
WELL, I GUESS I DO PLAY A LITTLE MORE THAN WHEN YOU WERE AROUND
AND THAT'S REALLY IT?
I DON'T KNOW, I CAN'T HELP BUT WORRY YOU RE JUST SLACKING OFF HARD
TO PLAY MORE VIDEO GAMES RIGHT?

NO WAY!
I EVEN GO TO MY LECTURES, AND STAY AWAKE DURING 'EM, TOO!
MOST PEOPLE CALL THAT THE BARE MINIMUM, AKIO
HMPH! REALLY?
HAHAHA
Now I'm a little embarrassed
Y'KNOW WHAT?
I THINK MEETING YOU LIKE THIS ISN'T SO BAD, AFTER ALL

I MEAN, I'M DOING ALRIGHT BY MYSELF,
AND I GET THE FEELING THAT THIS IS ABOUT ALL THE TIME YOU CAN DEVOTE TO A RELA-TIONSHIP AM I RIGHT?
THAT MAKES IT SOUND SO BAD!
BUT YOU MIGHT BE RIGHT
AHAHAH


HAHA
YEAH, I THINK SO TOO

Chapter 14
Hearts Laid Bare I

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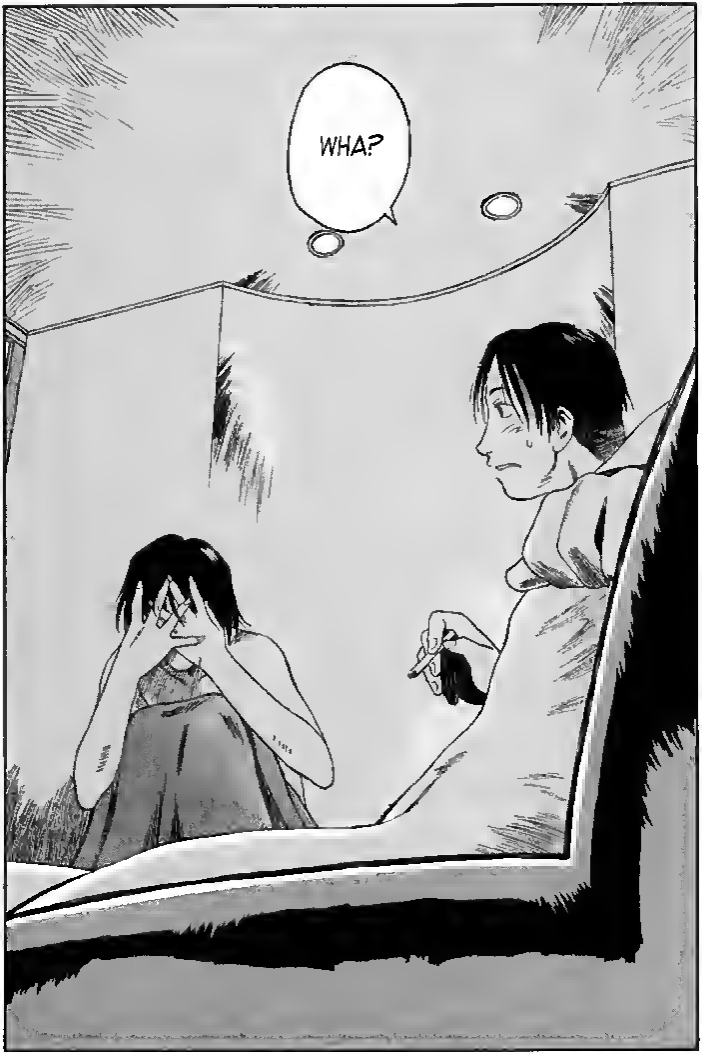
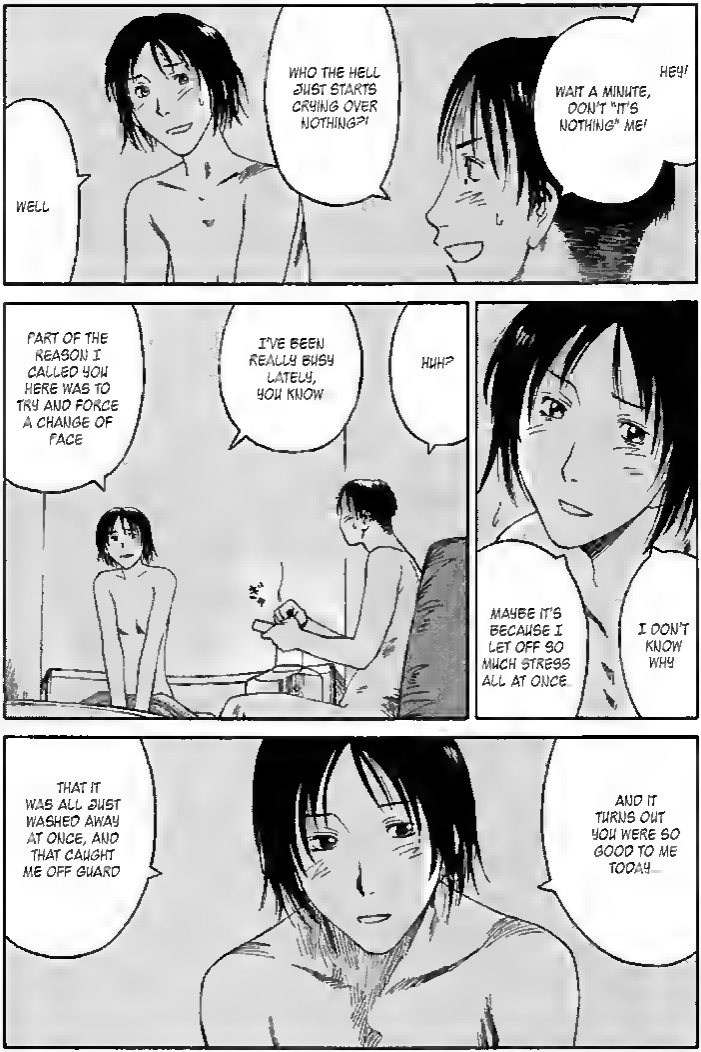

WHA?

.....
.....
WHAT'S THE MATTER?
HEY
グイ
グイ
OWW! SHIT! SHIT!
ポロ

IT'S NOTHING!
I'M FINE!
Phew...
MMFH
HAHA
OH, OKAY
WHEW


HEY!
WAIT A MINUTE, DON'T "IT'S NOTHING" ME!
WHO THE HELL JUST STARTS CRYING OVER NOTHING?!
WELL
I DON'T KNOW WHY
MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE I LET OFF SO MUCH STRESS ALL AT ONCE.
HUH?
I'VE BEEN REALLY BUSY LATELY, YOU KNOW
PART OF THE REASON I CALLED YOU HERE WAS TO TRY AND FORCE A CHANGE OF PACE
AND IT TURNS OUT YOU WERE SO GOOD TO ME TODAY...
THAT IT WAS ALL JUST WASHED AWAY AT ONCE, AND THAT CAUGHT ME OFF GUARD

MHMM
HUH REALLY?
WELL THAT'S GOOD, I GUESS
HUH... SO THAT WAS IT
HEHEHEH
HAHAHA HAHA
IT'S ALL THANKS TO YOUR AMAZING SKILLS IN BED, AKIO♡
SO WORK'S REALLY GETTING TO YOU, HUH?

WHAT'S WRONG?
HMM?
I CAN'T DO THIS
AH
I'M STILL SO WEAK
DO WHAT?

I'M SORRY
WHAT?
.....
.....
HUH?

I CAN'T DO THIS
I CAN'T DO THIS TO YOU
I HAVE TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH
ドクン…
ドクン…
ドクン…

...
I DON'T WANT TO BREAK UP WITH YOU OR ANYTHING IT'S NOTHING LIKE THAT
I'LL TELL YOU IN ADVANCE,
OHH! UMM
DON'T LOOK SO WORRIED
IT'S, WELL, LATELY,
THERE'S, UMM, THIS GUY I'VE BEEN MEETING
AND I LIKE HIM SORT OF A LOT
SOUNDS FUNNY, DOESN'T IT?
Hahah
Jesus Christ

REALLY! THAT'S ALL
YOU KNOW, IN A CAFE OR ON THE STREET OR WHERE-EVER
Haha...
IT'S NOT LIKE WE'RE DOING ANY-THING WE JUST MEET AND TALK FOR A BIT
OHH! BUT, UMM,
JUST MEET AND TALK, HUH
YOSHINO THAT'S CALLED A DATE
YOU WERE PROBABLY THE ONE WHO TALKED TO HIM FIRST NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND...
THEN THAT MEANS...
WELL...
ERR
HE'S JUST SOMEONE I HAPPENED TO MEET BY CHANCE
I DON'T THINK HE SEES IT THAT WAY, EITHER
NO NO, IT'S REALLY NOT LIKE THAT, HONEST

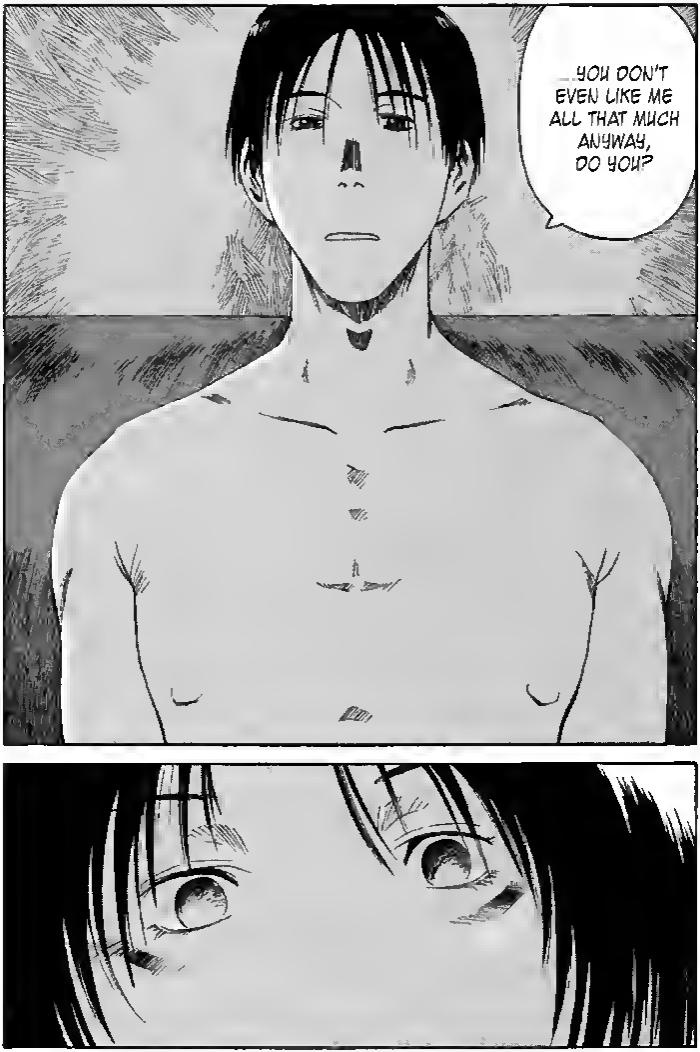
I GUESS I KIND OF FELL FOR HIM AT FIRST SIGHT
AHH SHIT, I KNEW IT.
HUH?
SO IT FINALLY HAPPENS, HUH

WHAT...?
I KNEW SOMETHING LIKE THIS WAS GONNA HAPPEN SOMEDAY...
WHAT'RE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
IF WE EVER BROKE UP...

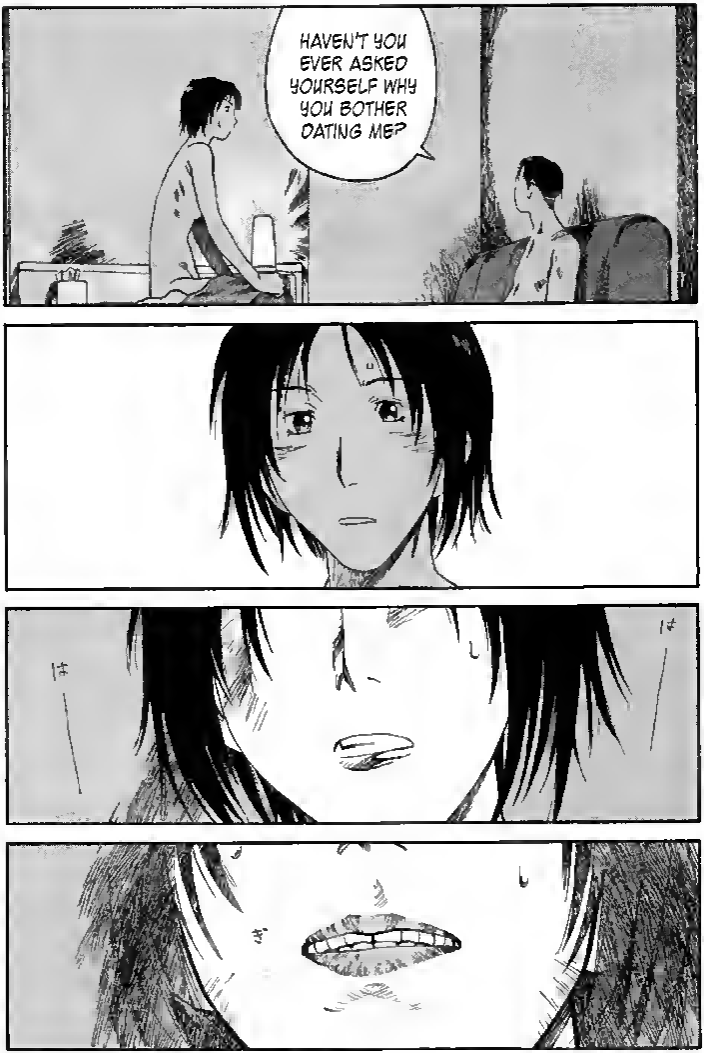
I KNEW IT'D BE BECAUSE YOU FOUND SOMEONE YOU REALLY LIKED
WHAT?
LOOK, I'M NOT SAYING I'M BREAKING UP WITH YOU, AKIO

I MEAN, THIS KIND OF THING HARDLY EVER PANS OUT ANY-WAY
I'VE BEEN THROUGH THIS KIND OF THING BEFORE, YOU KNOW, AND THEY ALL FELL THROUGH
MAYBE BUT
ONCE WE STARTED DATING,
YOU MADE A CONSCIOUS EFFORT TO KEEP YOUR ATTENTION AWAY FROM OTHER GUYS
YOU WERE SERIOUS ABOUT THAT
BUT NOW
THAT WALL YOU KEPT UP BETWEEN YOU AND MEN, IT'S BEEN BROKEN, HASN'T IT.

HEY!
THAT'S NOT WHAT WE SHOULD BE TALKING ABOUT!
WHAT'S IMPORTANT IS THAT I'VE GOT NO INTENTION OF BREAKING UP WITH YOU
DON'T YOU THINK YOU'RE BEING TOO HARD ON YOURSELF?
YOU CAN'T JUST SAY THAT I'M THE ONE DECIDING EVERYTHING IN OUR RELATIONSHIP!
...THAT YOU WERE THINKING THAT WAY ALL THIS TIME, AKIO
ACTUALLY THE REAL PROBLEM IS...
AND BESIDES, IT'S NOT LIKE THIS IS SOMETHING THAT'S ONLY HAPPENED TO ME!
WHO KNOWS, YOU MIGHT END UP FALLING FOR SOME GIRL ALL OF A SUDDEN
You're not being fair!
YEAH, BUT THE THING IS...


...YOU DON'T EVEN LIKE ME ALL THAT MUCH ANYWAY, DO YOU?

WHA ..
MAYBE YOU MIGHT FEEL SOME KINDA AFFECTION FOR ME, JUST CAUSE WE'VE BEEN DATING SO LONG
BUT IF YOU THINK ABOUT IT, THAT DOESN'T NECESSARILY MEAN YOU REALLY LOVE ME
WHAT?! YOU DUMMY! I DO TOO LOVE YOU!
I'VE LOST COUNT OF HOW MANY TIMES I'VE TOLD YOU THAT!
HOW COULD YOU LOVE A LAZY GUY LIKE ME, WITH NO JOB AND NO FUTURE?


HAVEN'T YOU EVER ASKED YOURSELF WHY YOU BOTHER DATING ME?
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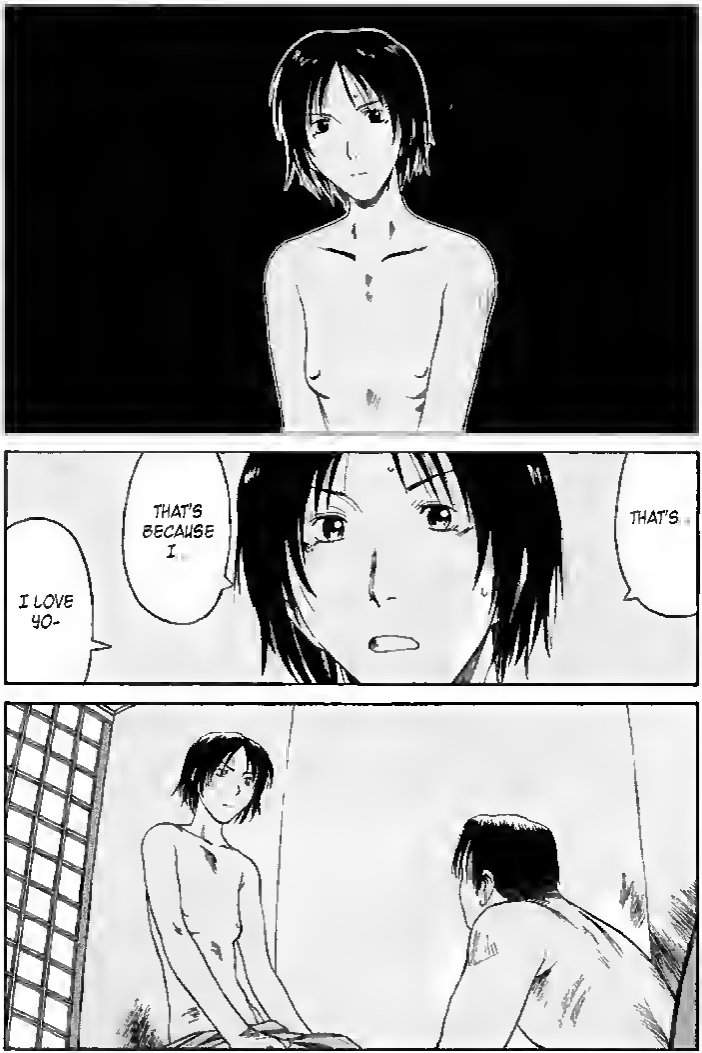
IT TOLD ME THAT YOU DION'T
IT WAS JUST SOMETHING ABOUT THE WAY YOU TREATED ME. THE WAY YOU SPOKE TO ME
YOU NEVER TRUSTED ME
NO MATTER HOW MUCH I TOLD YOU I LOVED YOU
SO THAT'S IT.
THAT'S HOW YOU SAW ME ALL THIS TIME.
AND NOW IT'S BECOME A SENSE OF MISTRUST THAT'S STUCK DEEP INSIDE OF ME
IT WAS THE LITTLE THINGS, BUT THEY PILED ON TOP OF EACH OTHER,

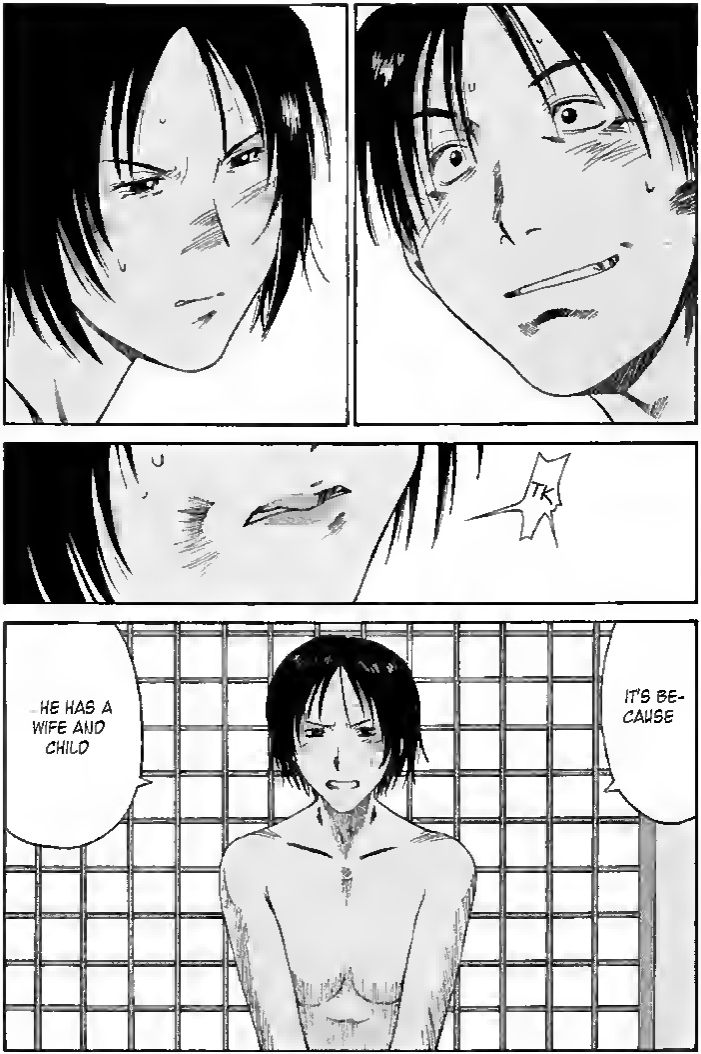
IS THAT WHAT YOU REALLY THINK?
.....
YOU WERE THINKING THAT SOONER OR LATER, WE'D BREAK UP
THEN ALL THIS TIME...
IT'S SOMETHING THAT MIGHT NEVER HAPPEN TO YOU YOUR WHOLE LIFE, BUT IF IT DOES HAPPEN. THEN IT HAPPENS! GET IT?!
LOOK.. THIS IS LIKE A CAR CRASH
THEN WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
WHAT? NO! I NEVER SAID THAT!
OF COURSE I HOPED IT'D NEVER HAPPEN!
SO OF COURSE...

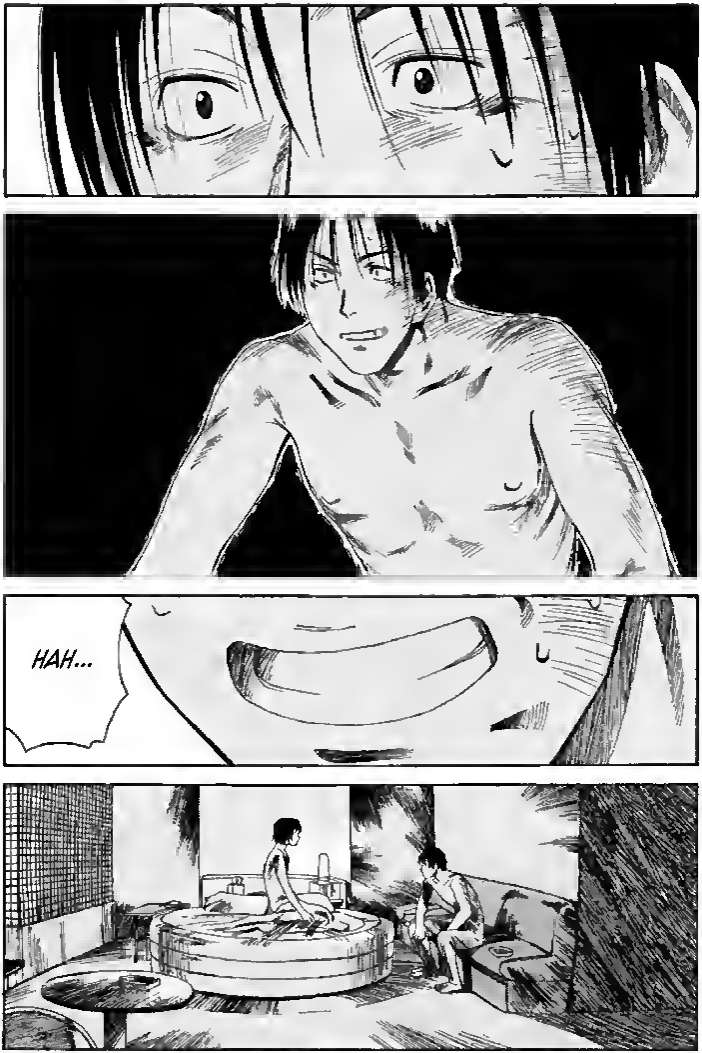
WELL NOW IT'S HAPPENED! NOW WHAT?!
I'M ASKING YOU WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO FROM NOW ON!
Are you just gonna give up?!
I TOLD YOU,
THAT DEPENDS ON WHAT YOU-
WHY ME AGAIN?!
YOU'RE SO WRAPPED UP IN BEATING YOURSELF UP THAT YOU'RE NOT EVEN THINKING OF WHAT TO DO!
IF YOU'RE GOING TO PLAY THE VICTIM, THEN DOES THAT MAKE ME THE PERPE-TRATOR?!

WELL IF YOU DON'T THEN DON'T! I DON'T WANT TO LEAVE YOU EITHER, SO WHAT'S THE PROBLEM HERE?!
THE HELL, YOU THINK I WANNA FUCKIN' BREAK UP WITH YOU?!
NOTHING, RIGHT?
WHAT'S THE PROBLEM...?

NO, THAT'S NOT IT
WHAT'S NOT IT?
IF YOU LOVE SOMEONE ELSE, TOO
THEN WHY THE HELL ARE YOU CHOOSING ME?

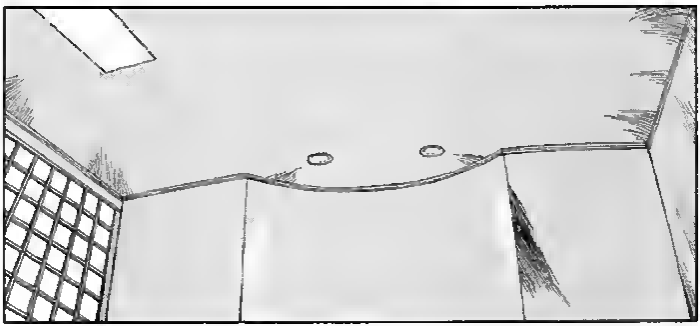

THAT'S
THAT'S BECAUSE I
I LOVE YO-


TK
...HE HAS A WIFE AND CHILD
IT'S BE-CAUSE


HAH...

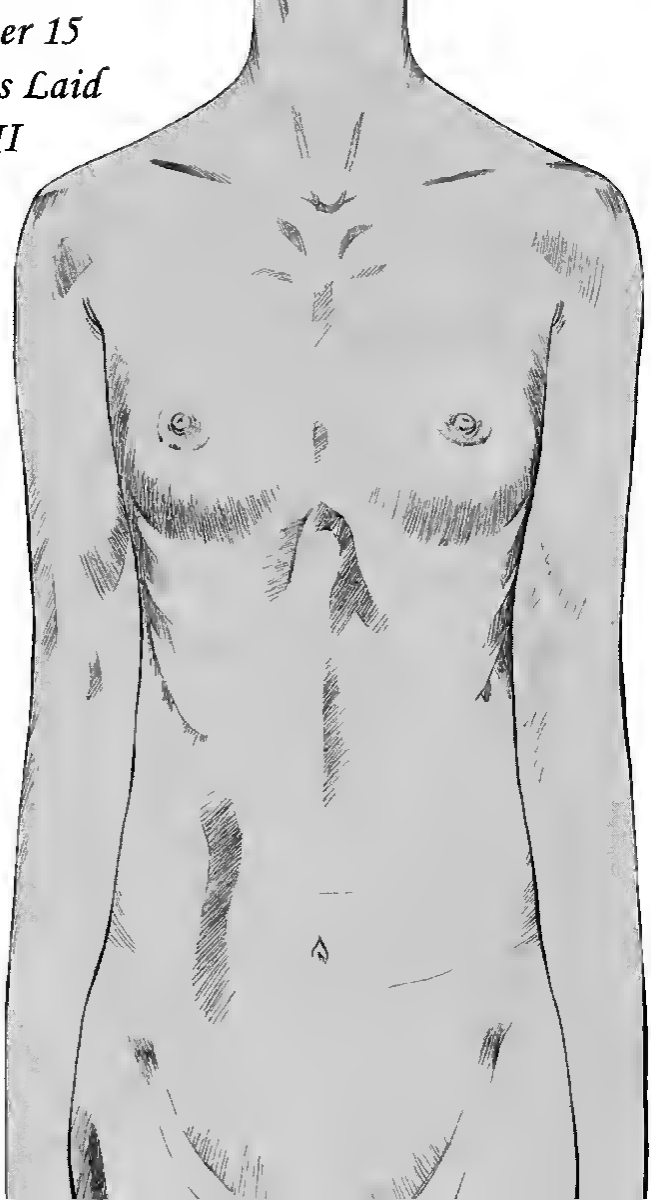
.....
.....
I'M SCARED, AKIO

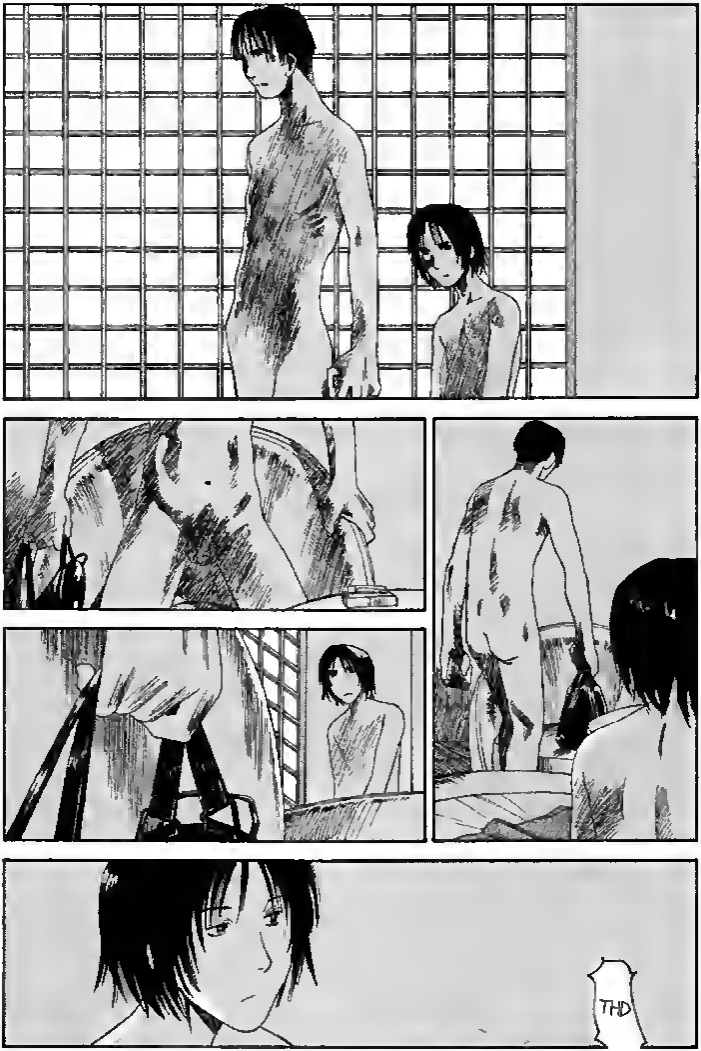
IT'S LIKE ALL THE THINGS I WAS HIDING FROM YOU ARE BEING REVEALED...



Chapter 14 - End

Chapter 15
Hearts Laid Bare II




THD

SO.
ADULTERY, HUH
.....

IF WE HAD SEX, IT WOULD BE
THOUGH I'M NOT GOING TO DO THAT
TELL ME THE TRUTH
I'M NOT IN THE MOOD FOR LIES
I KNOW...
SO TELL ME...
WHAT'S WHAT'S HE LIKE

HIS NAME IS HASEGAWA TOSHIHIKO
OKAY FIRST
HE WORKS AS AN AUDIO TYPIST
HE'S FORTY-TWO YEARS OLD

SORT OF LIKE A SCRIBE FROM OLD TIMES
TYPIST
AUDIO WHAT?
DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THAT WAS A JOB
OR COLLEGE LECTURES OR MEETINGS, AND WRITE EVERYTHING DOWN
SO, FOR EXAMPLE, HE'D LISTEN TO INTERVIEW RECORDINGS,
IT'S ALL THE SAME WORK
IT'S NOT MUCH FUN, EVEN IF YOU'RE DOING FOREIGN LANGUAGES
I DON'T THINK IT'S THE KIND OF THING YOU DO FREELANCE
MOST OF THEM WORK TOGETHER WITH LAW OFFICES OR OTHER PLACES THAT NEED THEIR SERVICES

HE HAS A WIFE AND A CHILD
HIS SON IS HARD OF HEARING
AND...
HUH

NOT MUCH TO SAY TO THAT, EXCEPT "OKAY"
HEH
WELL?
IRONIC, ISN'T IT? THE FATHER'S JOB DEPENDS ON SOUND, BUT THE SON CAN'T HEAR ANYTHING
YEAH
THAT'S GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS
WELL, I GUESS HE'LL BE ABLE TO HELP YOU A LOT ONCE YOU BECOME A LAWYER

I DON'T WANT TO RELATE TO HIM SIMPLY AS A LAWYER
AND BESIDES, I DON'T WANT TO WORK WITH HUMAN RIGHTS ANYWAY.
HEH
You've thought that answer over a lot huh
BESIDES, THE FACT THAT HE'S MARRIED AND HAS A KID WON'T CHANGE.
I DON'T WANT TO TOTALLY FALL INTO THE PIT OF ADULTERY
YOU'RE SERIOUSLY TELLING ME YOU THINK YOU HAVEN'T ALREADY?
NOT TO-TALLY

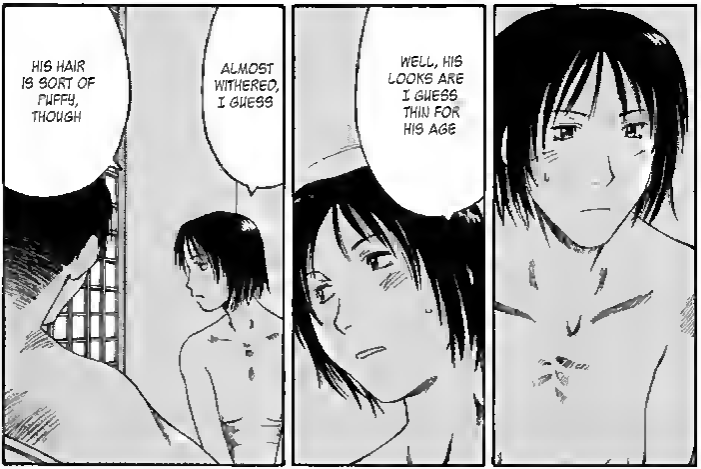
Is she telling the truth?...
ACTUALLY, MORE LIKE NOT AT ALL
WE'VE ONLY MET LIKE FIVE OR SIX TIMES SO FAR
AND EVEN WHEN WE DO MEET, WE CAN ONLY TALK FOR ABOUT AN HOUR BEFORE ONE OF US HAS TO GO
WHEN DID YOU MEET HIM?
FOR THE FIRST TIME? IN EARLY AUGUST
HUH
HASN'T EVEN BEEN TWO MONTHS, THEN
SO AROUND RIGHT AFTER THAT DATE WITH ME, HUH
MHMM
BUT IT'S NOT LIKE WE MEET AND FLIRT WITH EACH OTHER OR ANYTHING
WE JUST TALK ABOUT POINTLESS THINGS, YOU KNOW, SMALL TALK
THERE'S NOTHING SUGGESTIVE GOING ON BETWEEN US AT ALL

I HAVEN'T TOLD HIM I LIKE HIM EITHER
HE'S PROBABLY NOTICED BY NOW, BUT EITHER WAY I HAVEN'T SAID ANYTHING
HE DOESN'T SEEM TO FIND IT OFFENSIVE HE STILL CALLS ME FROM TIME TO TIME THAT'S IT
I'VE LIED TO YOU A LOT TODAY,
BUT THIS IS THE TRUTH
WAIT HOLD ON
SO YOU'RE TELLING ME
?

SO, YOU'RE SO BUSY YOU BARELY HAVE ANY FREE TIME,
AND IN THE TIME YOU ONLY JUST MANAGED TO SEE ME TWICE,
YOU MET THIS GUY HALF A DOZEN TIMES, JUST TO CHAT ABOUT NOTHING IN PARTICULAR?
AH...
YES, I GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT
DAMN...
SO... I MEAN...
JUST HOW GREAT IS THIS GUY, ANYWAY...?

AND I KNOW IT'LL JUST MAKE YOU ANGRY IF I TRY
WELL IT'S HARD TO EXPLAIN IT IN WORDS
MM

SO OUT WITH IT
AND YOU HAVEN'T TOLD ME ANYTHING ABOUT HIM EXCEPT WHAT HIS FAMILY'S LIKE
BELIEVE ME, YOSHINO I'M ALREADY PRETTY FUCKIN PISSED


HIS HAIR IS SORT OF FUFFY, THOUGH
ALMOST WITHERED, I GUESS
WELL, HIS LOOKS ARE I GUESS THIN FOR HIS AGE

IT'S THE SOUND OF HIS VOICE THE ATTENTION HE PAYS TO ALL THE SOUNDS AROUND HIM, THE WAY HE LISTENS THE WAY HE SPEAKS
BUT NONE OF THAT IS REALLY IMPORTANT.
EVERY SEPARATE WORD HE SAYS... HOW SHOULD I PUT IT?
I DON'T KNOW WHETHER IT'S BECAUSE OF WHAT HE DOES FOR A LIVING, OR IF IT'S HIS SON, OR IF THAT'S JUST THE WAY HE IS
I CAN'T REALLY SAY THAT THE WAY HE SPEAKS IS BEAUTIFUL OR CLEAN...
BUT... HMM... I GUESS THERE'S NOTHING I CAN SAY EXCEPT THAT HE'S SO CAREFUL ABOUT EVERY WORD HE CHOOSES TO SPEAK...

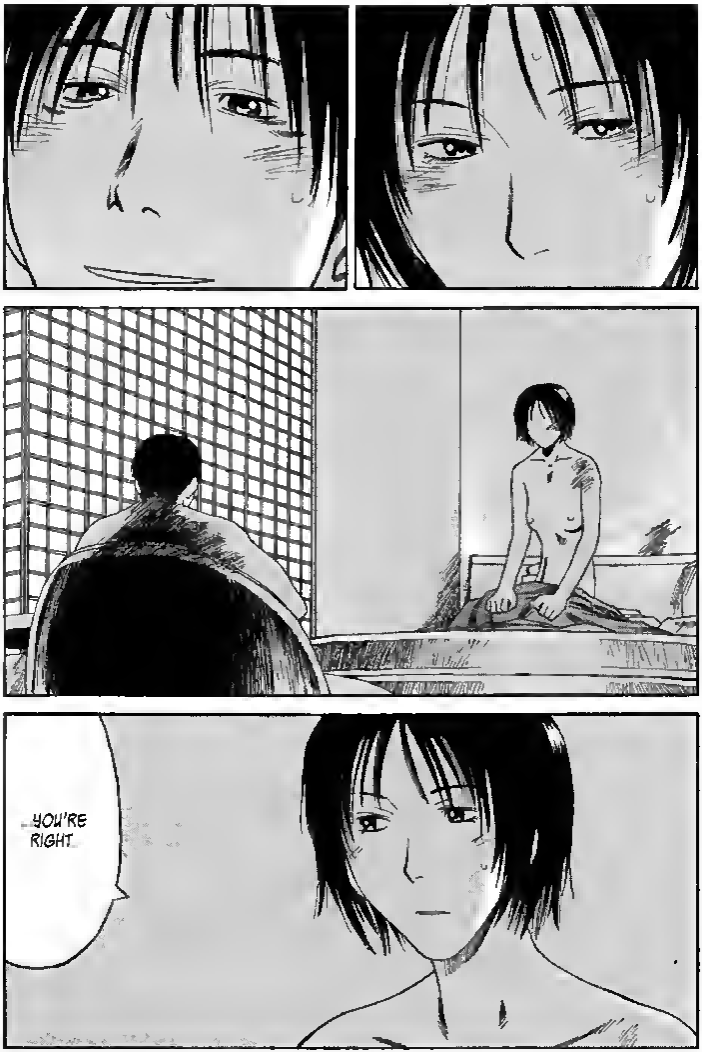
THE KIND THAT GRABS YOU WITH THE FORCE OF ITS WORDS, EVEN BEFORE YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THE CHARACTERS
I GUESS LAWS ARE LIKE THAT TOO. BUT LAWS ARE
NOVELS ARE NOTHING MORE THAN A COLLECTION OF WORDS. ANYWAY
I GUESS YOU COULD SAY HE TALKS LIKE A NOVEL...
NOT THAT I READ MANY, BUT STILL
BUT YOU KNOW THE KIND OF NOVEL I'M TALKING ABOUT, RIGHT?
THOUGH IF YOU ASKED ME TO GIVE SOME EXAMPLES, I DON'T THINK I'D BE ABLE TO

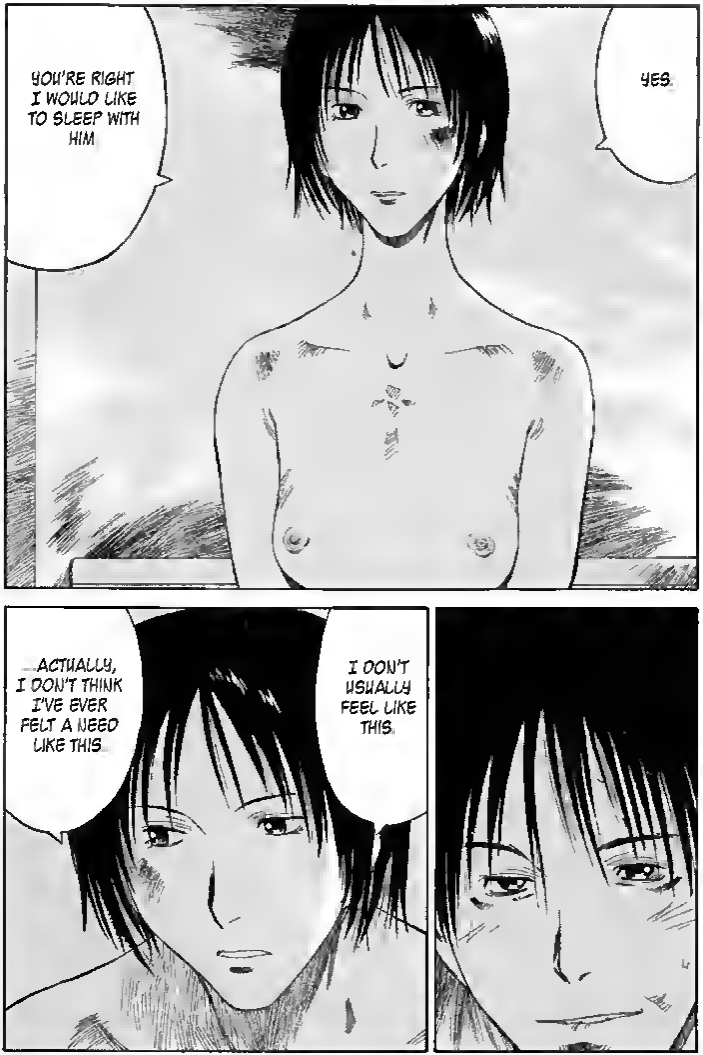
SO THIS IS WHAT IT'S LIKE
ギハー
しゅん
I CAN TELL HE'S A MUCH DEEPER GUY THAN SOMEONE LIKE ME
EVEN JUST HEARING THE STUFF ABOUT HIS KID
SO HE'S LIKE A NOVEL, EH

I CAN SEE WHY YOU'D FALL FOR HIM
I KNEW YOU'D START WITH THAT
SEE?
THAT'S WHY I ASKED YOU,
WHAT'RE WE GONNA DO FROM HERE?
I'M IN FULL ON SELF-DEBASEMENT MODE NOW
YEAH
AND THAT'S YOUR CUE TO GET MAD AT ME FOR DOING IT, EVEN IF IT'S YOUR FAULT

HEY, YOU'RE MISSING YOUR CUE GO AHEAD, GET PISSED AT ME
WHAT? YOU'VE OBVIOUSLY BEEN THINKING ABOUT THIS GUY A TON, SINCE YOU JUST CAN'T STOP TALKING ABOUT HIM
YOU SAY YOU DON'T WANT TO GET YOURSELF STUCK IN THIS, BUT YOU ACTUALLY WANTED TO KEEP IT GOING, DIDN'T YOU? AND KEEP HIM IN THE DARK ABOUT ME
YOU ACTUALLY WANTED TO GO FURTHER WITH HIM
RIGHT?
YOU WISH YOU COULD SLEEP WITH HIM, DON'T YOU?

I TOLD YOU HE WAS WRINKLY. I'M NOT INTERESTED IN HIS BODY.
STOP IT
NAH, I'M ALSO THINKING ABOUT HOW YOU'RE STILL LYING TO ME
IS THAT ALL YOU CAN THINK ABOUT?
AND HOW'RE YOU GONNA EXPLAIN HOW HORNY YOU WERE TODAY, HUH?
...HAHAH. SERIOUSLY? YOU CAN'T STOP THINKING ABOUT HIM AND YOU'RE TELLING ME YOU'RE "NOT INTERESTED" IN HIM?
WE AREN'T JUST CHATTING FOR SHITS AND GIGGLES HERE. YOU CAN'T HIDE THIS SHIT FROM ME ANYMORE.
WAKE UP, YOSHINO.


...YOU'RE RIGHT.


YOU'RE RIGHT I WOULD LIKE TO SLEEP WITH HIM
YES.
...ACTUALLY, I DON'T THINK I'VE EVER FELT A NEED LIKE THIS
I DON'T USUALLY FEEL LIKE THIS.

OR SIMPLY BECAUSE OF BASIC INSTINCT
EVERY TIME UP TILL NOW, I JUST DID IT BECAUSE MY PARTNER WANTED TO,
THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I'VE WISHED THAT SOMEONE'S HANDS WOULD CARESS MY BODY
YOU'RE NOT HIM, AKIO
NO, THAT'S NOT IT AT ALL...
SO I WAS BASICALLY A STAND-IN TODAY, HUH?
HAH!

NO
YOU COULD NEVER BE HIM
TODAY WAS WELL, IF I WERE TO BE CRUEL, I'D SAY IT WAS JUST AN OUTLET FOR MY DESIRE
AND IF THAT DESIRE CAME ABOUT BECAUSE OF HIM, THEN I SUPPOSE YOU COULD SAY THAT YES, YOU WERE JUST A STAND-IN
FUCKIN' HELL
OH?
IT'S NOT LIKE YOU'VE NEVER USED ME TO SATISFY YOUR OWN URGES, AKIO
WELL ... YES, IT IS CRUEL TO SAY THAT
IT REALLY IS

I DON'T GET ALONG WITH WOMEN. I DON'T WITH MEN, EITHER
AND I HATE MYSELF FOR THINKING THIS WAY
BUT THIS IS THE KIND OF PERSON THAT I AM
THIS DOESN'T HAVE MUCH TO DO WITH WHAT I SAID EARLIER,
BUT WHILE I DO THINK THAT HUMAN RIGHTS NEED TO BE UPHELD, I REALLY HATE PEOPLE WHO STAND UP AND CALL FOR THEM TO BE ENFORCED
I JUST DON'T LIKE PEOPLE IN GENERAL
"STOP THE AUTHORITARIANISM!" "RESPECT THE RIGHTS OF THE STUDENTS!"
THAT'S WHAT THEY CRIED
YOU KNOW BACK IN HIGH SCHOOL THE STUDENTS AT MY SCHOOL ACTUALLY BOYCOTTED ONE OF THE SCHOOL EVENTS ONCE

THEY WERE CHILDREN, THINKING THAT STICKING "THE RIGHT TO" ONTO SOMETHING JUSTIFIED THEIR GREED
BUT DO YOU KNOW WHAT THOSE RIGHTS TURNED OUT TO BE? THE RIGHT TO WEAR WHAT THEY WANTED, THE RIGHT TO AVOID PUNISHMENT, THE RIGHT TO HAVE RELATIONSHIPS, THE RIGHT TO HAVE PART-TIME JOBS

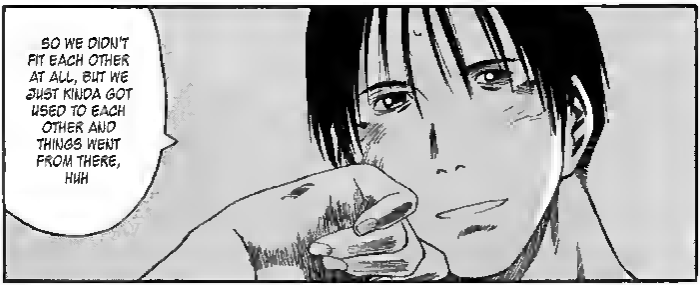
I GUESS THAT IN A WAY, THAT WAS ALL THEY COULD DO RIGHTS EXIST FOR THE SAKE OF THE WEAK, AFTER ALL
I DIDN'T SAY THAT OUT LOUD, OF COURSE AND IN THE END THE "REVOLT" WAS ENDED AND THE PARTICIPANTS WERE PUNISHED, LIKE YOU MIGHT'VE GUESSED
I THOUGHT THEY WERE IDIOTS
THE WORLD WOULDN'T CHANGE FOR THE SAKE OF THEIR PETTY TANTRUMS IF YOU WANT TO CHANGE SOMETHING, STUDY HARD SO YOU CAN GET THE POWER TO MAKE IT HAPPEN YOURSELF

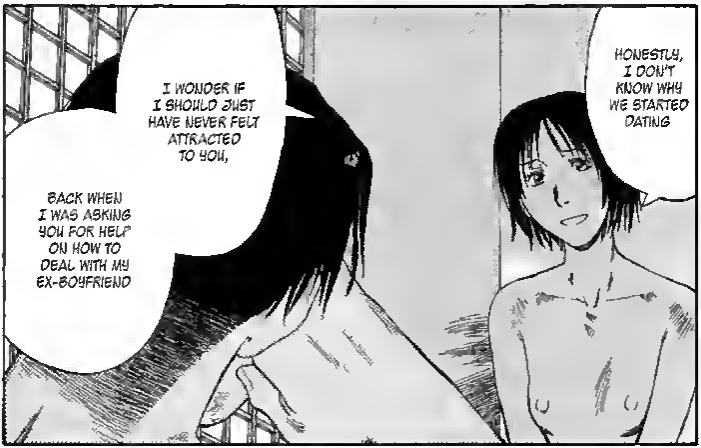
THAT WAS WHEN I REALLY BEGAN TO HATE STUPID PEOPLE
THAT WAS WHEN I REALLY BEGAN TO HATE MYSELF, FOR LOOKING DOWN ON THEM.
THAT'S SOMETHING THAT'S COMMON BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN WELL, THERE WERE ONLY GIRLS AT MY MIDDLE SCHOOL, BUT STILL
THEY ALWAYS BELIEVE THEY'RE IN THE RIGHT, SO THEY NEVER THINK TO LISTEN TO OTHERS

I'VE BEEN LOOKING DOWN ON YOU ALL THIS TIME, TOO, BECAUSE I THINK YOU RE STUPID
AND YOU FELT THAT UNCONSCIOUSLY, AND THAT'S WHAT MADE YOU SO SUBMISSIVE TO ME, WASN'T IT?
I WONDER WHAT SOMEONE LIKE ME IS EVEN DOING, TRYING TO BECOME A LAWYER IN THE FIRST PLACE
OH, THAT'S RIGHT AKIO
WHY ARE YOU DATING A BITCH LIKE ME?

...DIDN'T YOU SAY YOU HATED STUPID PEOPLE?
THEN WHAT THE HELL'RE YOU DOING DATING ONE YOURSELF?

AHAHAHA!
YOU'RE RIGHT, THERE'S NO REASON WHY WE SHOULD HAVE EVER STARTED DATING.


SO WE DIDN'T FIT EACH OTHER AT ALL, BUT WE JUST KINDA GOT USED TO EACH OTHER AND THINGS WENT FROM THERE, HUH


HONESTLY, I DON'T KNOW WHY WE STARTED DATING
I WONDER IF I SHOULD JUST HAVE NEVER FELT ATTRACTED TO YOU,
BACK WHEN I WAS ASKING YOU FOR HELP ON HOW TO DEAL WITH MY EX-BOYFRIEND

DUNNO WHY YOU'RE BRINGING THAT OLD SHIT UP AGAIN
BUT IT'S NOT LIKE I REALLY HAD A CHOICE
I DIDN'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT WITH OTHER GIRLS
AND YOU WERE THE ONLY MALE FRIEND I HAD WHO I FELT I COULD TALK ABOUT IT WITH
THIS HASN'T GOT ANYTHING TO DO WITH HASEGAWA
I GUESS IN A WAY WE WERE FATED TO START DATING,
AND EQUALLY FATED TO END UP LIKE THIS
HAHAHA!

WHOA, WHOA
I DON'T EVEN LIKE THE GUY AND I'M FEELING SORRY FOR HIM
WHO KNOWS? HE MIGHT HAVE JUST BEEN AN EXCUSE TO MAKE THIS HAPPEN BETWEEN US
I HAVE TO THINK ABOUT IT THAT WAY, TO MAKE IT EASIER TO LEAVE HIM
Not that we were ever together but you know what I mean
STILL
DAMN
THAT DOESN'T MATTER IT'LL NEVER HAPPEN ANYWAY, AND I'LL HAVE TO LEAVE HIM SOONER OR LATER
DIDN'T YOU JUST SAY YOU WANTED TO SLEEP WITH HIM?
OH?

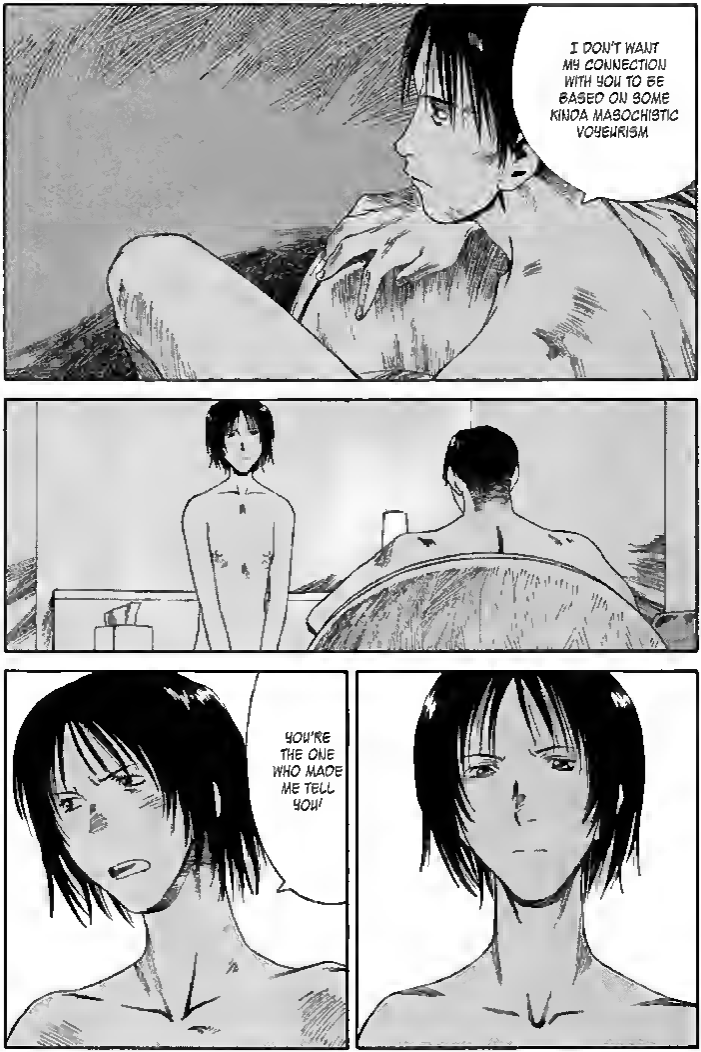
YOU'RE GETTING RID OF TWO BURDENS IN ONE FELL SWOOP, EH?
GOOD FOR YOU, THEN.
DOESN'T IT KIND OF FEEL LIKE WE CAN'T BREAK UP ANYMORE?
HEY, YOU KNOW? NOW THAT WE'VE COME THIS FAR, THOUGH,
HUH?

DON'T YOU THINK THAT NOW WE'VE HAD SUCH A FRANK AND UGLY TALK.
WE CAN PUT IT ALL BEHIND US AND FINALLY START HAVING A RELATIONSHIP FOR REAL?
YOU'RE FUCKIN' CRAZY.

Chapter 16 - That Predictable Sense of Distance, and the Absence of Thought

IT'D NEVER WORK OUT AS WELL AS YOU'RE SAYING
HUH? BUT?
NOW THAT WE'VE SHOWN SO MUCH OF OURSELVES TO EACH OTHER
DON'T YOU THINK WE'LL UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER SO MUCH BETTER THAN BEFORE? DON'T YOU THINK WE ALREADY DO?
YEAH, MAYBE I KNOW MORE ABOUT YOU THAN I DID YESTERDAY, YOSHINO
BUT... THE THING IS...

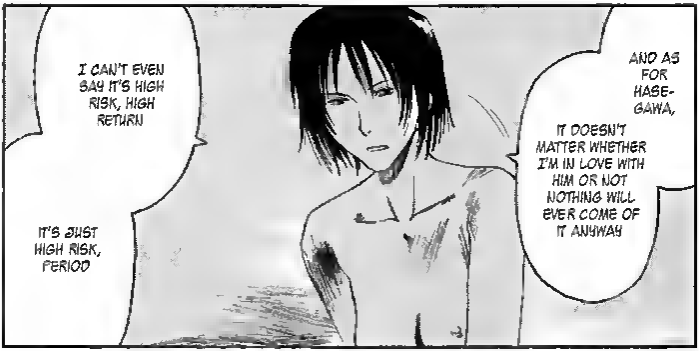
HELL, I DON'T EVEN UNDERSTAND MYSELF THAT WELL, MUCH LESS SOMEONE ELSE.
BUT IT'S NOT THAT CLEAR, THAT UNDERSTANDING
IF I ASKED YOU RIGHT NOW WHETHER YOU'VE SHOWN ME EVERYTHING ABOUT YOURSELF, YOU'D SAY "NO," WOULDN'T YOU?
HELL, THAT GOES FOR ME, TOO. I'VE GOT TONS OF SHIT I STILL HAVEN'T TOLD YOU.
NOBODY CAN DO THAT. NOT UNLESS THEY'RE CRAZY, OR SOME KINDA PERVERT.
SHOW SOMEONE ELSE EVERYTHING ABOUT YOURSELF?

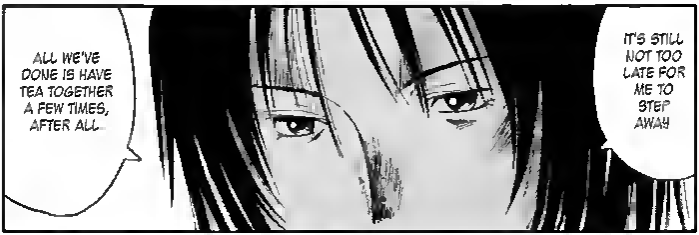

I DON'T WANT MY CONNECTION WITH YOU TO BE BASED ON SOME KINDA MASOCHISTIC VOYEURISM
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO MADE ME TELL YOU!

WELL...
GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT ABOUT THAT...
WAIT...
WHY'D YOU SAY THAT, ANYWAY?
HMM?
I MEAN,
WHY MAKE IT SOUND LIKE YOU STILL WANNA STAY TOGETHER?
THAT'S SIMPLE
IT'S BECAUSE I DECIDED I DIDN'T WANT TO BREAK UP WITH YOU

WHA...
HOW THE HELL DID YOU REACH THAT CONCLUSION?
YOU JUST SAID WE HAD NO REASON TO KEEP SEEING EACH OTHER!
AND WE DON'T HAVE ANY REASON TO BREAK UP, EITHER

I'M SERIOUS HERE
DON'T PLAY AROUND WITH ME
HELL, DIDN'T YOU SAY YOU HATED DUMB PEOPLE, TOO?
I DON'T REALLY THINK YOU'RE STUPID, AKIO
YOUR PERSONALITY COULD USE SOME WORK, BUT I THINK YOU'RE ACTUALLY PRETTY SMART
YOU'D HAVE TO BE, TO MAKE ME LOSE MY HEAD LIKE YOU DID TODAY
SO WHAT I'M SAYING IS, I DON'T HATE YOU AT ALL
God damn
IF I REALLY THOUGHT YOU WERE THAT STUPID,
I'D HAVE DUMPED YOU A LONG TIME AGO


I CAN'T EVEN SAY IT'S HIGH RISK, HIGH RETURN
IT'S JUST HIGH RISK, PERIOD
AND AS FOR HASE-GAWA,
IT DOESN'T MATTER WHETHER I'M IN LOVE WITH HIM OR NOT NOTHING WILL EVER COME OF IT ANYWAY

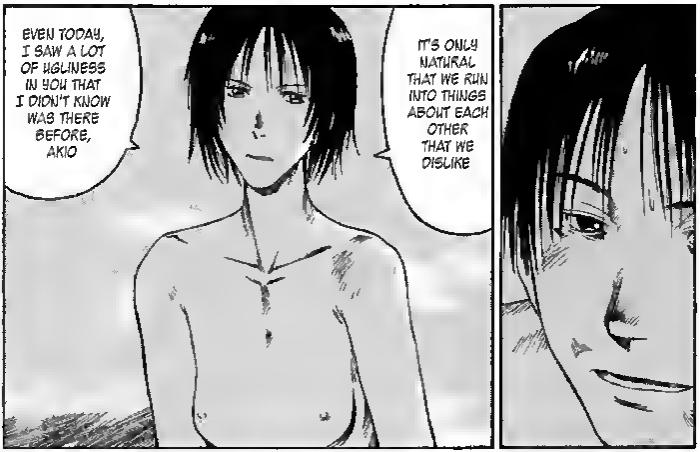

ALL WE'VE DONE IS HAVE TEA TOGETHER A FEW TIMES, AFTER ALL
IT'S STILL NOT TOO LATE FOR ME TO STEP AWAY

CAN'T YOU FORGIVE ME, AKIO?
ARE YOU GOING TO DUMP ME?
STILL, I'LL APOLOGIZE FOR THAT. I'M SORRY.

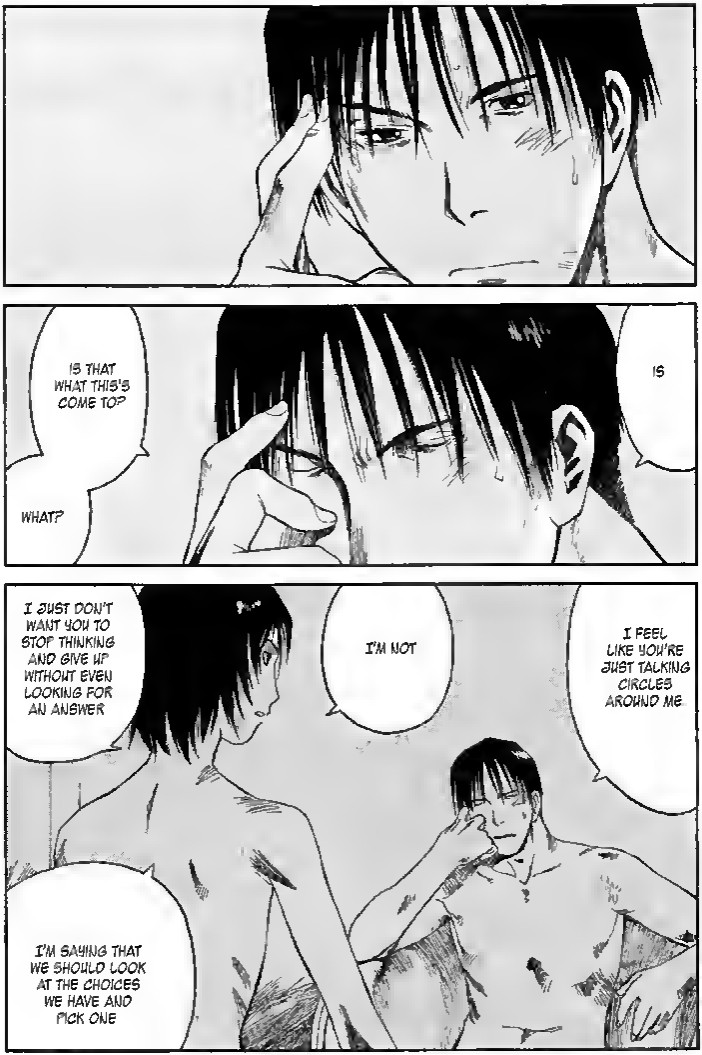
IS THAT EVEN A CHOICE, TO YOU?
HOLD UP
THAT'S NOT WHAT WE WERE TALKING ABOUT
THE PROBLEM IS THAT WE'VE MOSTLY BEEN COASTING ON INERTIA
IF YOU ACTUALLY LOOK AT WHO WE REALLY ARE, OUR RELATIONSHIP IS FUCKIN' FULL OF PROBLEMS
WHO WE REALLY ARE?
HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT?

WHAT?
IT'S LIKE YOU SAID, AKIO I HAVEN'T SHOWN YOU EVERYTHING ABOUT MYSELF YET
AND YOU SAID YOURSELF THAT YOU WERE STILL HIDING PARTS OF YOURSELF TOO
YOU AND I, WE'RE STILL HIDING SO MUCH FROM ONE ANOTHER
SO "WHO WE ARE"? THAT'S NOTHING BUT WHAT WE DECIDED WAS SAFE TO SHOW SO FAR
IT'S NOT MUCH, IN THE BIG SCHEME OF THINGS
HUH?
DO YOU REALLY THINK SO?

OF COURSE IT DOES
DOESN'T THAT MEAN WE'RE GONNA FIND EVEN WORSE, EVEN UGLIER PARTS ONCE WE REALLY START LEARNING ABOUT EACH OTHER?
BUT WAIT,


EVEN TODAY, I SAW A LOT OF UGLINESS IN YOU THAT I DIDN'T KNOW WAS THERE BEFORE, AKIO
IT'S ONLY NATURAL THAT WE RUN INTO THINGS ABOUT EACH OTHER THAT WE DISLIKE

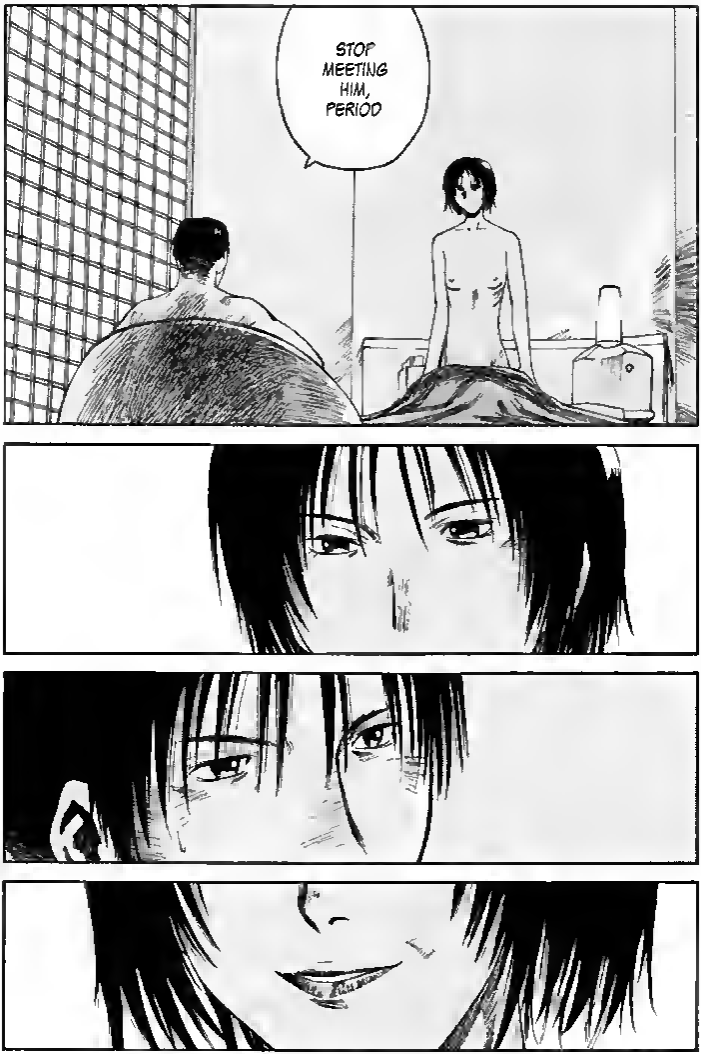
SO MY QUESTION IS, WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO, AKIO, NOW THAT YOU'VE SEEN THESE UGLY PARTS OF ME?
BUT I'M STILL SAYING THAT I WANT TO STAY WITH YOU


IS THAT WHAT THIS'S COME TO?
WHAT?
IS
I JUST DON'T WANT YOU TO STOP THINKING AND GIVE UP WITHOUT EVEN LOOKING FOR AN ANSWER
I'M NOT
I FEEL LIKE YOU'RE JUST TALKING CIRCLES AROUND ME
I'M SAYING THAT WE SHOULD LOOK AT THE CHOICES WE HAVE AND PICK ONE

WHAT ABOUT YOU, AKIO?
I'VE CHOSEN TO TRY AND STAY TO-GETHER
WELL, FUCK
OF COURSE I DON T WANT TO BREAK UP WITH YOU
WHETHER WE CAN STILL MAKE THIS WORK
BUT I DON'T KNOW

THAT'S NOT A YES OR A NO
IF YOU REALLY WANT SOME-THING,
YOU HAVE TO DO SOMETHING TO MAKE SURE IT HAPPENS
FINE
WE'LL STAY TO-GETHER

BUT ON ONE CONDI-
TION
STOP MEETING HASEGAWA. THIS'S NON-NEGOTIABLE

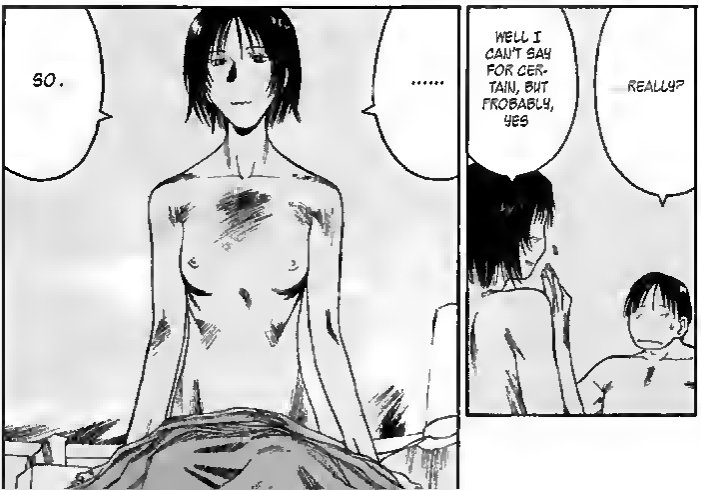

STOP MEETING HIM, PERIOD

OKAY

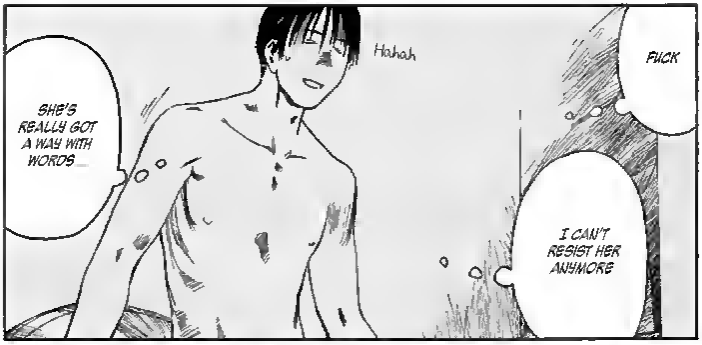
WHAT WAS THAT ALL ABOUT?
COME HERE
OKAY,
JUST NOW, YOU JUST SMILED
WHAT?
HUH?
IF YOU'D JUST SAID THAT FROM THE BEGINNING, NONE OF THIS WOULD'VE HAD TO HAVE HAPPENED
THINK ABOUT IT
WHAT?
THAT WAS WHAT I'D WANTED TO HEAR FROM YOU MOST, ALL THIS TIME
ISN'T IT OBVIOUS?

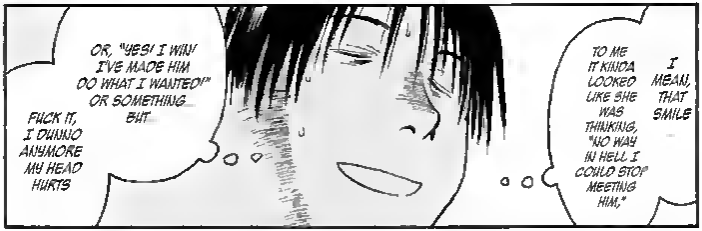
IF YOU HADN'T SAID, "I KNEW THIS WAS GOING TO HAPPEN SOMEDAY,"
AND INSTEAD JUST GOTTEN MAD AT ME AND YELLED "DON'T YOU DARE CHEAT ON ME!",
THEN THAT WOULD'VE BEEN IT.

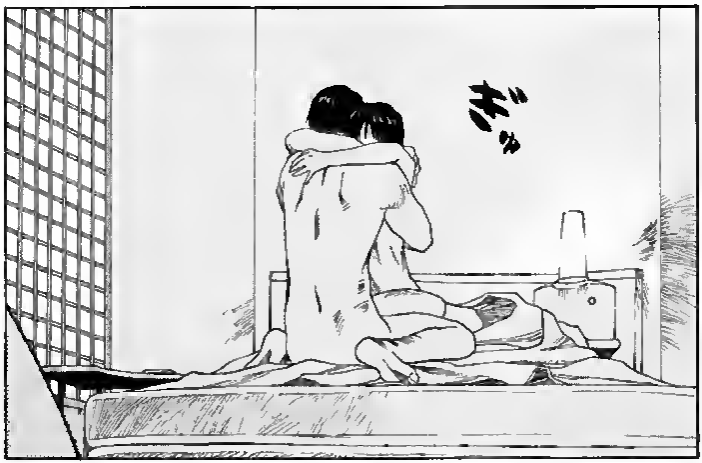
THEN I WOULD HAVE APOLOGIZED, AND BEEN SORRY,
AND EVEN FELT A LITTLE REASSURED BY THE KNOWLEDGE THAT YOU LOVED ME SO MUCH.

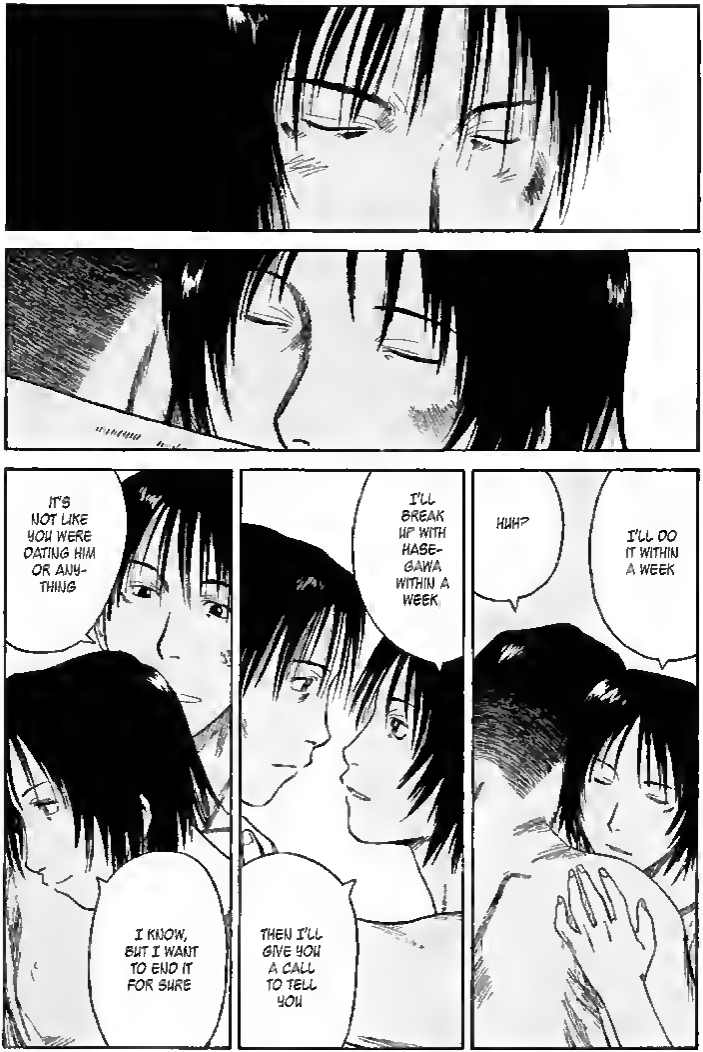

REALLY?
WELL I CAN'T SAY FOR CERTAIN, BUT PROBABLY, YES
.....
SO.

COME TO ME.
HERE, AKIO


Hahah
FUCK
I CAN'T RESIST HER ANYMORE
SHE'S REALLY GOT A WAY WITH WORDS...


I MEAN, THAT SMILE...
TO ME IT KINDA LOOKED LIKE SHE WAS THINKING, "NO WAY IN HELL I COULD STOP MEETING HIM."
OR, "YES! I WIN! I'VE MADE HIM DO WHAT I WANTED!" OR SOMETHING... BUT...
FUCK IT, I DUNNO ANYMORE MY HEAD HURTS




I'LL DO IT WITHIN A WEEK
HUH?
I'LL BREAK UP WITH HASE-GAWA WITHIN A WEEK
IT'S NOT LIKE YOU WERE DATING HIM OR ANY-THING
THEN I'LL GIVE YOU A CALL TO TELL YOU
I KNOW, BUT I WANT TO END IT FOR SURE

YEAH.
WAIT FOR MY CALL, OKAY?
IF YOU DON'T HOLD ME TIGHT, I MIGHT JUST RUN AWAY TO HIM.
BE CARE-FUL

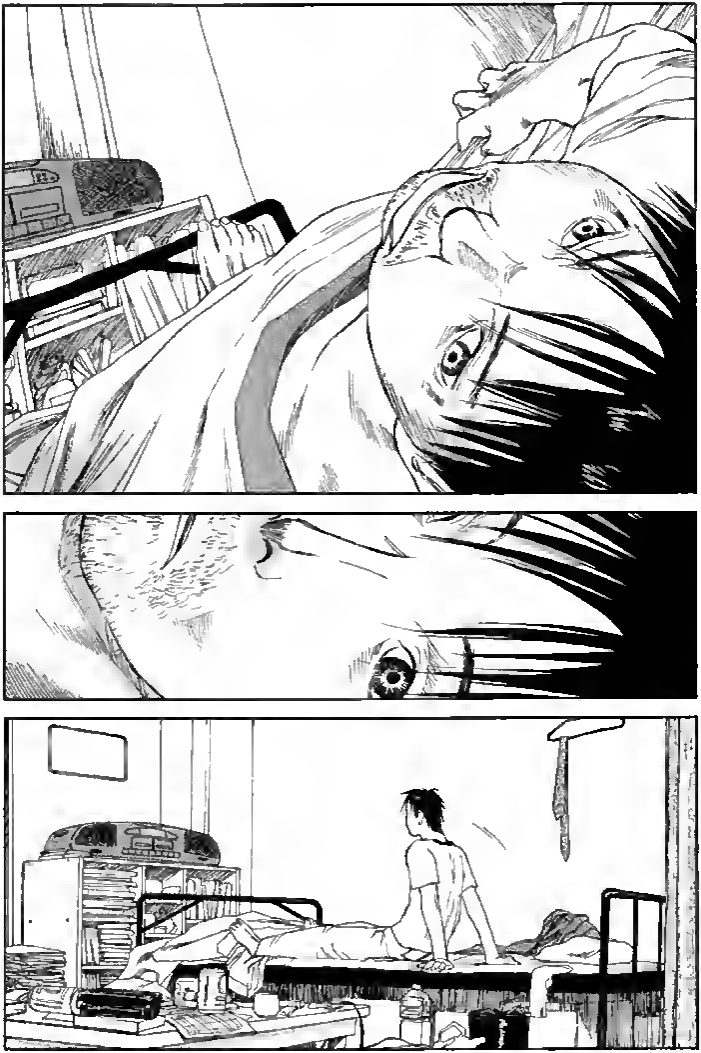
SO YOU WANT ME TO STOP YOU FROM LEAVING, EH?
HAHA
OH MAN
HEHEHEH
MAKE ME YOURS, AKIO ♡
YOU WENCH! I'LL MARK YOU TO LET OTHER MALES KNOW YOU'RE TAKEN!
Lemme give you a hickey
AHAHAHA!♡
We made love again, and then showered together, and then left the hotel.

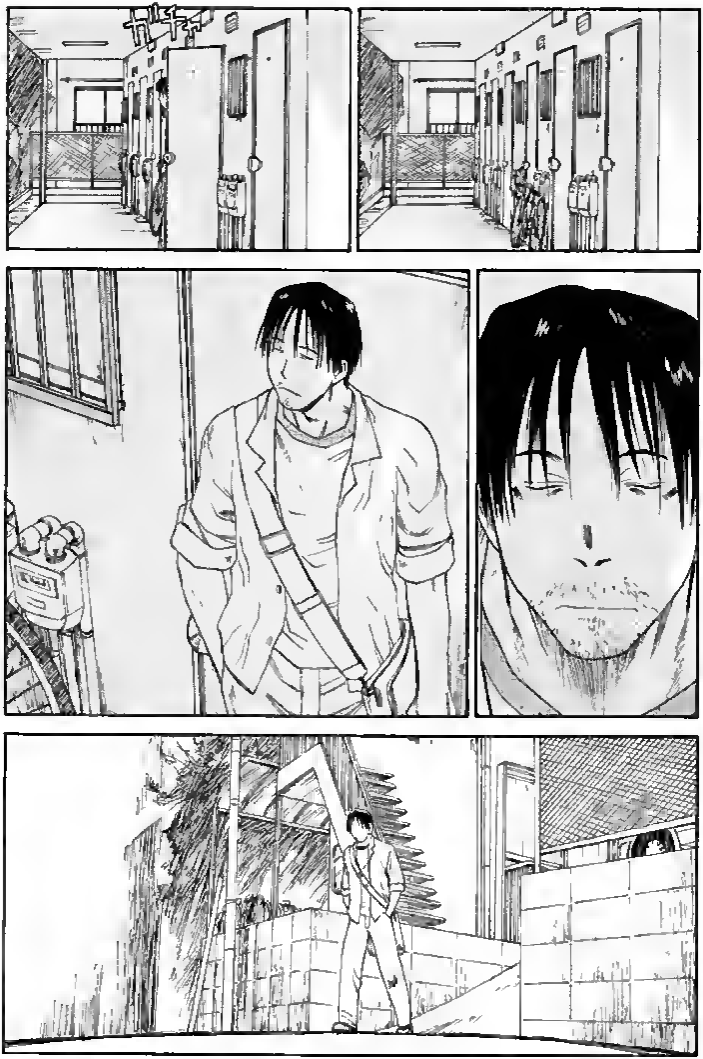
WELL, IT'S STILL A BIT EARLY, BUT I'M HUNGRY YOU?
WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO?

And as I'd expected..

And Yoshino never called.

A week passed. And then another. And another.





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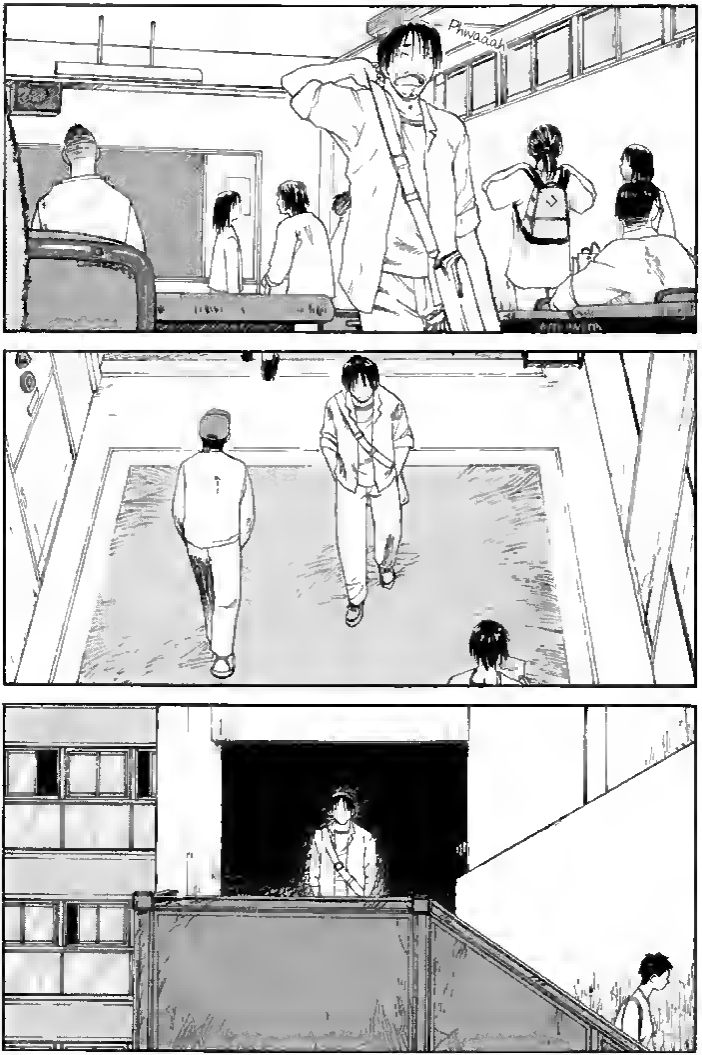

Pwaaah

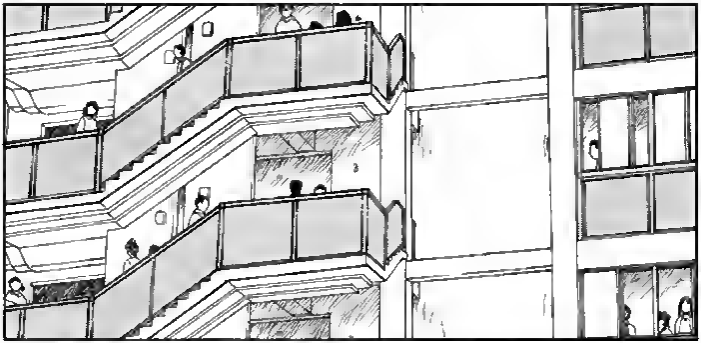
Raaah. I guess she couldn't do it. I know she's actually pretty bad at cutting ties with people, once she's gotten to know them. (Why do guys always seem to flock to her?) I mean, what bothers me most is the way she put on an act back then, even knowing we almost never see each other. (Not the talk about being honest or whatever, it's more the bit where we fucked again, y'know?) Makes me feel like a dumbass. I shouldn't have pressed her so hard. With this much distance between us it's almost impossible to fix things if something goes wrong (Though it's easy for us to forget about each other, I guess.) I misjudged what that sense of distance'd do to us. I went into it like I would've when we were both in Kisarazu. Shit, does that mean it's the long-distance relationship that fucked us over? Fuck that. I guess I'm just bad at judging that kinda distance. Always was. Nothing much I can do about that. (...)

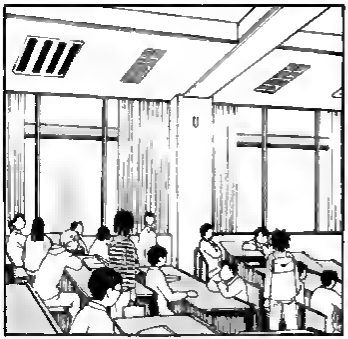
Chapter 17
Separate Rooms

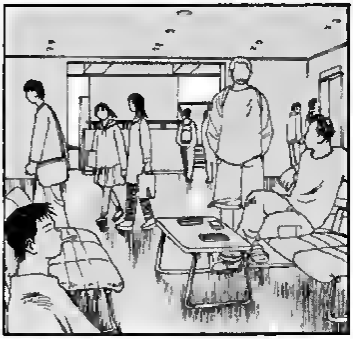
First year, April.
SO THIS SECOND SLOT ON TUES-DAY
I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO PICK
WELL ONE OF 'EM'S A TEACHER TRAINING COURSE, RIGHT?
YUP I DON'T THINK THOSE EVEN GIVE YOU CREDIT HOURS
WHAT, THAT'S A THING? WHAT A PAIN
YEAH, THERE'S STUFF YOU HAVE TO TAKE AND STUFF YOU DON'T
CAN'T WE JUST FOLLOW WHAT THIS SAYS AND BE ALRIGHT?

PERSONALLY, I'M NOT GONNA BE TAKING ANY OF THOSE TEACHING COURSES
HAHA
WHY NOT?
GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT
WHO THE HELL WANTS TO MAKE A LIVING TEACHING A BUNCHA KIDS?
BUT THEN WHAT DO I CHOOSE?
WELL, WHEN YOU PUT IT THAT WAY...
I MEAN, IF YOU'RE LOOKING TO BE A TEACHER, THEN SURE, GO FOR IT, BUT IF YOU'RE NOT I THINK MY WAY'S BETTER
BESIDES, I THINK TAKING COURSES FROM OTHER DEPARTMENTS IN THAT TIME'D BE MORE FUN

BUT IT DOESN'T SAY THAT, IT SAYS "OPTIONAL"!
DOESN'T THAT JUST MEAN ELECTIVES?
WHAT'S THIS? "OPTIONAL"?
MAYBE I PICKED THE WRONG GUYS TO HANG WITH
MAN, I FEEL KINDA OUT OF PLACE
Everyone's being really studious and mature



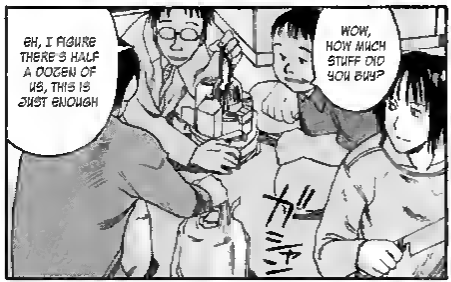


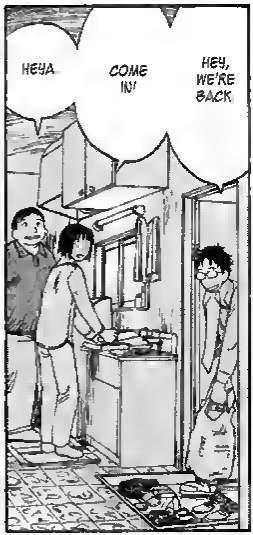


FUCK, MAN THIS SHIT'S HEAVY. WHY COULDN'T WE JUST GO TO A BAR OR SOMETHING?
WELL, THING IS

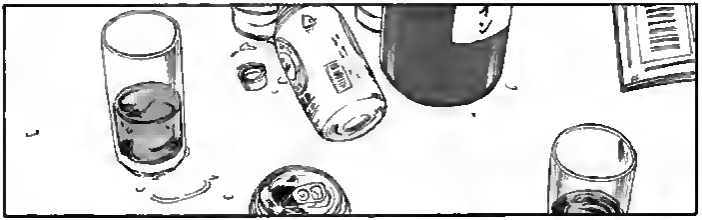
First year, June.

WELL, YEAH, BUT STILL
BARS ARE LOUD, AND EXPENSIVE TOO
CHK
You really like this kinda thing, huh.

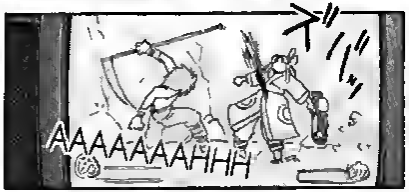

EH, I FIGURE THERE'S HALF A DOZEN OF US, THIS IS JUST ENOUGH
WOW, HOW MUCH STUFF DID YOU BUY?

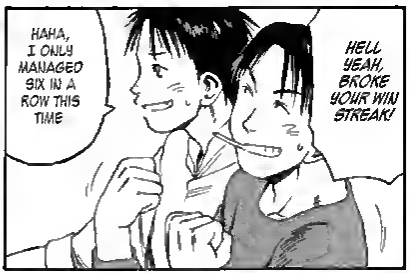

HEYA
COME IN!
HEY, WE'RE BACK

THANKS FOR HELPING
WHEW I NEED TO SIT DOWN
YEAH NO PROBLEM



SEKIGUCHI, SWITCH WITH ME
ALRIGHT, I'M QUITTING WHILE I'M AHEAD YOU'RE TOO GOOD


AAAAAAAHHH


HELL YEAH, BROKE YOUR WIN STREAK!
HAHA, I ONLY MANAGED SIX IN A ROW THIS TIME

HEY
WHAT'RE YOU ALL DOING HERE?
WHOOPS
WELL WE WERE AVOIDING CIGARETTE SMOKE, BUT...
MAN AM I REALLY THE ONLY ONE WHO SMOKES HERE? FEELS LIKE I'VE DONE SOMETHING WRONG
MHMM WHY DON'T YOU JUST TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY TO QUIT?
HEY, WERE YOU A DELINQUENT IN HIGH SCHOOL OR SOMETHING?
WHAT? C'MON, TONS OF NORMAL PEOPLE SMOKE
OH? AND WHAT PROOF DO WE HAVE THAT YOU'RE NORMAL, MR. SHIMA?
HEY! I HAVEN'T EVEN BEEN SUSPENDED BEFORE, Y'KNOW! Haha.

YUP
EVERYONE WAS DUMB
Me included
OH, RIGHT
I FORGOT EVERYONE'S DUMB IN HIGH SCHOOL
ACTUALLY, BACK IN HIGH SCHOOL THEY THOUGHT IT WAS PRETTY COOL
I CAN'T IMAGINE THE GIRLS LIKED IT WHEN YOU SMOKED
STILL, EVEN THEY DIDN'T LIKE IT WHEN WE KISSED
IT'S NOT LIKE THEY HAD A CHOICE. IT'S NOT GETTING USED TO IT, IT'S TOLERATING IT
THOUGH I THINK THEY GOT USED TO IT PRETTY QUICK
AND I BET SOON THEY JUST STARTED TELLING YOU THEY WEREN'T IN THE MOOD TO KISS!
YUP
HUH, YOU THINK?

WELL I GUESS THAT TEACHES YOU TO JUDGE PEOPLE BY THEIR APPEARANCES
YOU'RE PRETTY FUN TO TALK WITH, SOMA WASN'T EXPECTING THAT
THOUGHT YOU'D BE THE STUFFY TYPE
RIGHT?
HAHAHAHA!
You're always studying
Nothing to do with being stuffy
Beside you
Hmmm

NEED A LIGHT?

OH THANKS
YOU'RE A LIFE-SAVER

YOU TOO, RIGHT?
HUH? YUP.
YOU'RE IN THE LAW SCHOOL, RIGHT?
ハンチョ
HAH
I KNOW I'VE SEEN THAT HAIR IN CLASS
WELL, SEE YA
じゃ

WHAT? NO, YOU DUMMY OF COURSE I'D NEVER CHEAT ON YOU
YEAH UH HUH
OH, YEAH, YOU'RE AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE, SO JUST TWO YEARS, RIGHT?
HOW'RE THINGS OVER THERE?
MAN, ANOTHER YEAR AND YOU'LL ALREADY HAVE TO START LOOKING FOR A JOB
NOT THAT I HAVE ROOM TO TALK
YEAH I MEAN, I'M FROM SAKURA
Heheh
NO REALLY
THE PEOPLE HERE, YOU CAN REALLY TELL THEY'RE FROM THE COUNTRY
HAHA
HELL, CAN YOU GET A JOB? I DUNNO HOW MUCH A TWO YEAR DEGREE COUNTS FOR THESE DAYS
MMM MHMM HAHA YEAH, OKAY
JUST GRADUATE, SIT TIGHT FOR TWO MORE YEARS, AND I'LL COME FOR YA

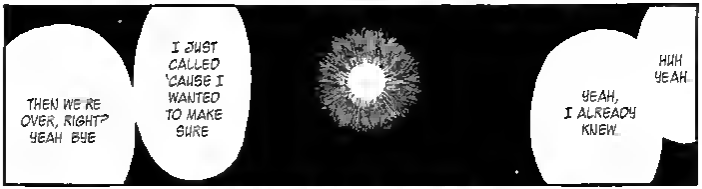
First year, July.
HEY
MORNING
DON'T SUPPOSE ANY CLASSES WERE CANCELED TODAY?
NO SUCH LUCK, SORRY

SEE YA
ANYWAY I HAVE TO RUN SEE YOU!
ROOM CHANGE 'CAUSE OF CONSTRUCTION, EH?
OH BUT YOU SHOULD PROBABLY TAKE NOTE OF THIS ONE
LET'S HAVE DRINKS AGAIN TOGETHER SOMETIME!
YEAH, SURE

AHEM
IS THIS THING ON?
HAHA
NOT MUCH, YOU?
SUP

ALRIGHT, ALRIGHT, QUIET DOWN
LET'S GET STARTED!

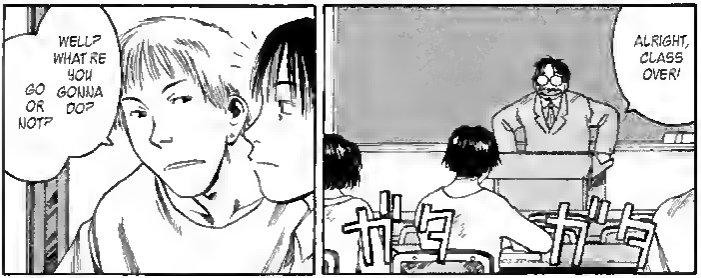
Second year, December


I JUST CALLED 'CAUSE I WANTED TO MAKE SURE
THEN WE'RE OVER, RIGHT? YEAH BYE
HUH YEAH
YEAH, I ALREADY KNEW

HEY THERE WHAT'RE YOU UP TO?

I'VE ALREADY MADE UP MY MIND
OH?
OH, I SEE
HMM TRYING TO DECIDE WHO I WANT AS MY ADVISOR
YUP PROFESSOR TANIYAMA
I KNOW HE LOOKS A BIT SCRUFFY, BUT IT TURNS OUT HE'S ACTUALLY A PRETTY AMAZING PERSON
HUH... REALLY?
Third year, April.
I'M PUTTING OFF INTRODUCTIONS UNTIL THE PARTY

GOES WITHOUT SAYING I'LL BE THERE TOO
SO EVERY-ONE TRY AND MAKE IT THERE!

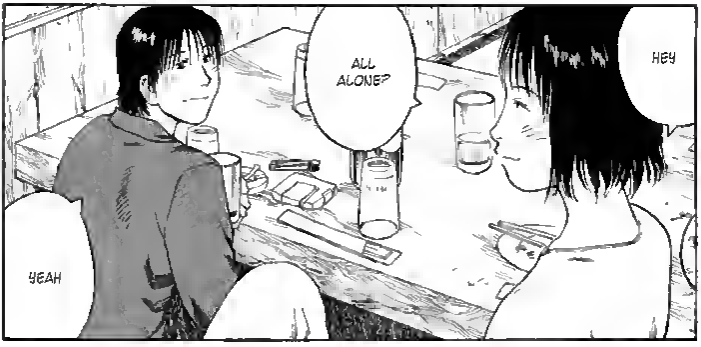

WELL? WHAT RE YOU GONNA DO? GO OR NOT?
ALRIGHT, CLASS OVER!
ガタ ガタ

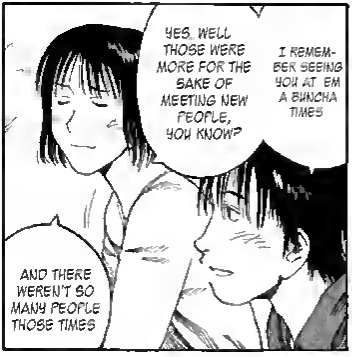
MEH, DON'T FEEL LIKE IT
I THINK HE EXPECTS EVERYONE TO BE THERE
HAHAH, C'MON YOU'LL BE FINE ONCE YOU DRINK A LITTLE

BLARGH, I'M BORED
NO, NO, I UNDER-STAND
WHAT I MEAN IS...
YOU THINK I'M HOPING FOR TOO MUCH?
WHEN YOU GET INTO COLLEGE THERE'S CERTAIN THINGS YOU EXPECT!
SO LOOK, ALL I'M SAYING IS,

Oh, see the girl over there?
Yeah, she's pretty hot.
THAT'S REALLY SOMETHING I FEEL WHEN I LOOK AT SOMA
BUT IN THE END IT'S UP TO YOU TO MAKE THOSE THINGS HAPPEN
UGH, I'M GETTING REALLY PISSED OFF! YOU'RE NOT LETTING ME SAY WHAT I HAVE TO SAY! THAT'S NOT WHAT THIS IS ABOUT!
NO, IT'S FINE
SORRY 'BOUT THIS, UHH, ARIGA, WAS IT? YEAH, HE'S USUALLY NOT THIS BAD
THERE, THERE THAT'S A GOOD BOY

OKAY
Ahahaha
DO THAT AGAIN?
Phwoaaa
You a bion I were
ERR SORRY
I THINK I'LL MOVE SEATS
AHAHAHA
HEY, SO WHAT'S TANIYAMA LIKE?
IS HE THE STRICT TYPE?
LIKE, HE DOESN'T EVEN CALL ROLL RIGHT?
He's like that with everything
IF HE THINKS YOU WANT TO LEARN, HE'LL TEACH YOU EVERYTHING HE KNOWS. BUT IF YOU'RE NOT LIKE THAT HE WON'T BOTHER YOU
HE PRETTY MUCH LEAVES EVERYONE BE
NAH, MORE LIKE THE OPPOSITE
OH, OKAY


HEY
ALL ALONE?
YEAH


I REMEMBER SEEING YOU AT 'EM A BUNCHA TIMES
YES. WELL THOSE WERE MORE FOR THE SAKE OF MEETING NEW PEOPLE, YOU KNOW?
AND THERE WEREN'T SO MANY PEOPLE THOSE TIMES

I REALLY THINK I'M NOT CUT OUT FOR DRINKING PARTIES
REALLY?

.....
.....

HMM?
What the hell
HUH? HEY! YOU OKAY?!
I SAW YOU TALKING A LOT WITH PROFESSOR TANIYAMA EARLIER WHAT'S HE-
Nnngh
ARIGA?
WERE YOU MAKING HER DRINK?
Whuh?
NO, NOT REALLY
I mean, I didn't stop her but
LEAVE HER TO REST AND SHE'LL BE FINE
SHE'S JUST PASSED OUT FROM DRINKING TOO MUCH AT ONCE
SHE'S REALLY A LIGHTWEIGHT, ISN'T SHE?

HOLD ON, HER ADDRESS WILL BE IN THE REGISTER
NOBODY?
IS ANYONE HERE HER FRIEND?
HOW'S SHE GOING TO GET HOME?
AND IF SHE CAN'T, WE'LL GET SOMEONE TO DRIVE HER HOME
IF SHE CAN WAKE UP ENOUGH TO WALK YOU AND SOMA CAN ESCORT HER,
WHAT? NO WAY
You're a guy
THEN I'LL TAKE HER HOME
DRIVE? PROFESSOR EVERYONE HERE'S BEEN DRINKING
YESSIR!
Urp
Wahahaha
I WAS JOKING, OF COURSE!

Third year, May
YO, IT'S ME, SHIMA
WHO IS IT? Urgh
...HANG ON A SEC

UNNGH...
HEYA SORRY, DID I WAKE YOU UP?
IS SOMEONE HERE?
WAIT,
MMFGH
HUH?
SKSH SKSH
UMM MORNING, SHIMA

SERIOUSLY? WE WERE ALL OVER EACH OTHER RIGHT IN FRONT OF YOU, MAN
I KNEW YOU HADN'T NOTICED
SKRTCH SKRTCH SKRTCH
WAIT THE TWO OF YOU? REALLY?
HUH? WHAT?
AHAHAHA
AHAHA, YOU'RE SO BAD AT THIS
I JUST KINDA THOUGHT YOU WERE REALLY GOOD FRIENDS AND DIDN'T REALLY THINK ABOUT IT
ERR UMM
YOU JUST DIDN'T CARE ENOUGH TO NOTICE, DIDDAP

GONNA WASH UP
ガシャガシャガシャ
SO, WHH, SINCE WHEN?
ACTUALLY I KINDA HAD A THING FOR HER SINCE BEFORE THAT PARTY
HEHEH
IT'S BEEN A WHILE, ACTUALLY
SINCE BEFORE THE HOLI-DAYS, AT LEAST
WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME?
AHAHA
WE DIDN'T EVEN TRY TO HIDE IT FROM YOU HELL, WE EVEN TALKED ABOUT WHERE TO GO ON DATES RIGHT IN FRONT OF YOU
I WAS TESTING YOU, DUMBASS WAITING TO SEE WHEN YOU'D NOTICE

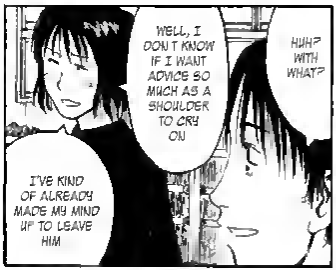
OOH, COUNT ME IN!
OR DON'T, AND LET'S PLAY SOME FIFA FIFA
YEAH, YEAH, CRY ME A RIVER
MAN, I FEEL SO BE-TRAYED
SHEESH, YOU TWO RE JUST TRYING TO MAKE ME JEALOUS, HUH?
OH MAN ARIGA, IS THIS YOURS? YOU DON'T HAVE ONE ON RIGHT NOW?
...CK... HOLY SHIT!
...HUH? WHAT'S THAT? A BRA?
It was in the blankets
The same time, elsewhere.

Chapter 18 Those Good Old Days (Always the Same Trap)

...YOU TASTE LIKE CIGARETTES.
MMM...
Nnh...
LET ME TAKE OFF MY CLOTHES?
.....
HAAH...
SO WE'VE FINALLY COME TO THIS, HUH, SHIMA.
WHAT?

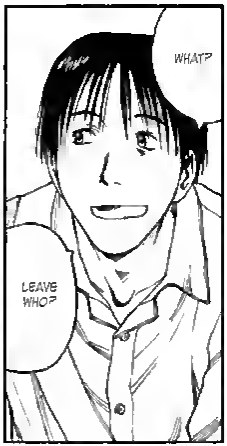
I KIND OF EXPECTED THIS WOULD HAPPEN
Third year, June.
HEYA, SOMA
OH, GOOD MORNING
Hah
Haah

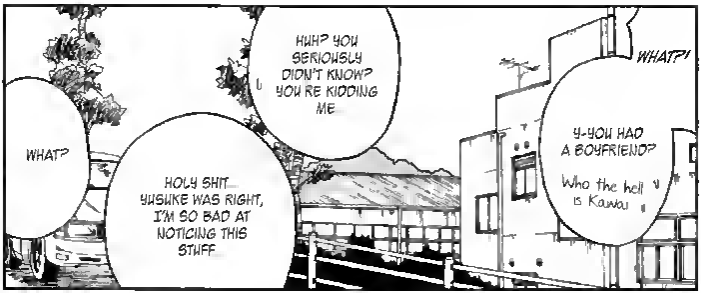
MHMM
DO YOU HAVE TO WORK?
WHAT? YOU WANNA HAVE A DRINK WITH ME?


WELL, I DON'T KNOW IF I WANT ADVICE SO MUCH AS A SHOULDER TO CRY ON
I'VE KIND OF ALREADY MADE MY MIND UP TO LEAVE HIM
HUH? WITH WHAT?

OKAY, GOOD
ACTUALLY I WANTED TO ASK YOU FOR YOUR ADVICE
ERR NAH, I DON'T I'M FREE

MY BOY-FRIEND OF COURSE
HMM?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN WHO?
YOU KNOW, KAWAII?


WHAT?
LEAVE WHO?

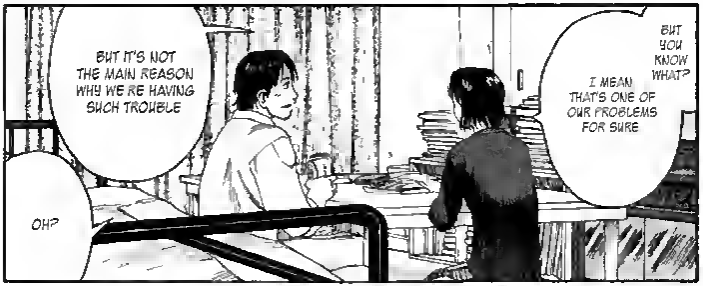

WHAT?
HUH? YOU SERIOUSLY DIDN'T KNOW? YOU'RE KIDDING ME
HOLY SHIT... YUSUKE WAS RIGHT, I'M SO BAD AT NOTICING THIS STUFF
WHAT?!
Y-YOU HAD A BOYFRIEND?
Who the hell is Kawai

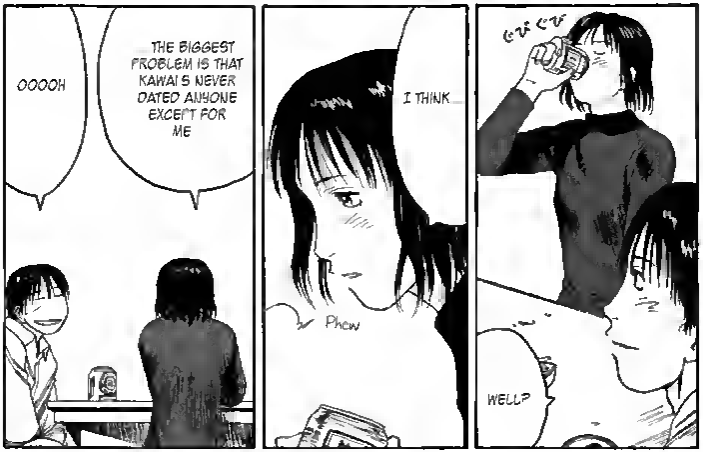
YEAH, THOUGH I DUNNO HOW, EITHER
MAN, I'VE BEEN THE ODD MAN OUT ALL THIS TIME, HUH...
HAHAHA, REALLY?
YOU DIDN'T NOTICE THEY WERE SEEING EACH OTHER?

WELL, WE STARTED DATING IN OUR SECOND SEMESTER, SO TECHNICALLY IT HASN'T BEEN TWO WHOLE YEARS YET
GAH, SERI-OUSLY?
YOU'RE TELLING ME I DIDN'T NOTICE FOR TWO WHOLE YEARS?
I'VE BEEN SEEING KAWAI SINCE WE WERE FIRST YEARS
WELL, IN MY CASE

Wow
Okay
Man...
BUT YOU KNOW WHAT? THIS ISN'T JUST MY FAULT THIS STEMS FROM A FAILURE ON BOTH OUR PARTS
Phew
OUR PERSONALITIES JUST DON'T MATCH UP WELL ON A VERY BASIC LEVEL
LIKE, FOR EXAMPLE...
HE MAKES ME LISTEN TO ROCK MUSIC THAT I CAN'T UNDER-STAND,
OR ASKS ME TO WATCH THOSE STUPID ENTERTAINMENT SHOWS ON TELEVISION WITH HIM,
AND ONCE HE MADE ME HIKE UP A MOUNTAIN WITH HIM FOR NO REASON AT ALL,
AND THEN HE WANTS TO WASTE TWO WHOLE HOURS WATCHING A MOVIE OF ALL THINGS!
Umm
I think those're called "dates."

YES!
SO, YOU'RE BASICALLY SAYING HE'S A NUISANCE
THAT'S EXACTLY IT!


BUT IT'S NOT THE MAIN REASON WHY WE'RE HAVING SUCH TROUBLE
BUT YOU KNOW WHAT?
I MEAN THAT'S ONE OF OUR PROBLEMS FOR SURE
OH?


OOOOH
THE BIGGEST PROBLEM IS THAT KAWAI'S NEVER DATED ANYONE EXCEPT FOR ME
I THINK...
Phew
CU CU
WELL?

BUT BACK WHEN WE WERE DATING AND SHE WAS THE ONLY GIRL I'D EVER KNOWN? MAN I COULDN'T THINK OF ANYTHING BUT HER
IT WAS LIKE THE WORLD SHRANK DOWN TILL SHE WAS THE ONLY THING IN IT
YEAH, PERSONALLY, I DON'T HAVE ANY REGRETS ABOUT MY FIRST GIRLFRIEND ANYMORE,
SO BASICALLY, KAWAI'S HEAD OVER HEELS IN LOVE WITH YOU RIGHT?
YEAH I GUESS YOU THINK YOUR FIRST IS REALLY SPECIAL, HUH?
I DON'T THINK I'VE EVER SEEN YOU DRINK LIKE THIS
YEAH... NORMALLY I'D ALREADY HAVE A HEADACHE BY NOW
Wonder why I'm okay now
Just pour me a little in a cup?
I CAN'T REALLY HOLD MY DRINK I'M ALREADY PRETTY TIPSY SO I DON'T KNOW IF I CAN MANAGE A CAN
GOTCHA
OH WELL IF YOU WANT MORE BEER I'VE GOT PLENTY
IT'S EMPTY

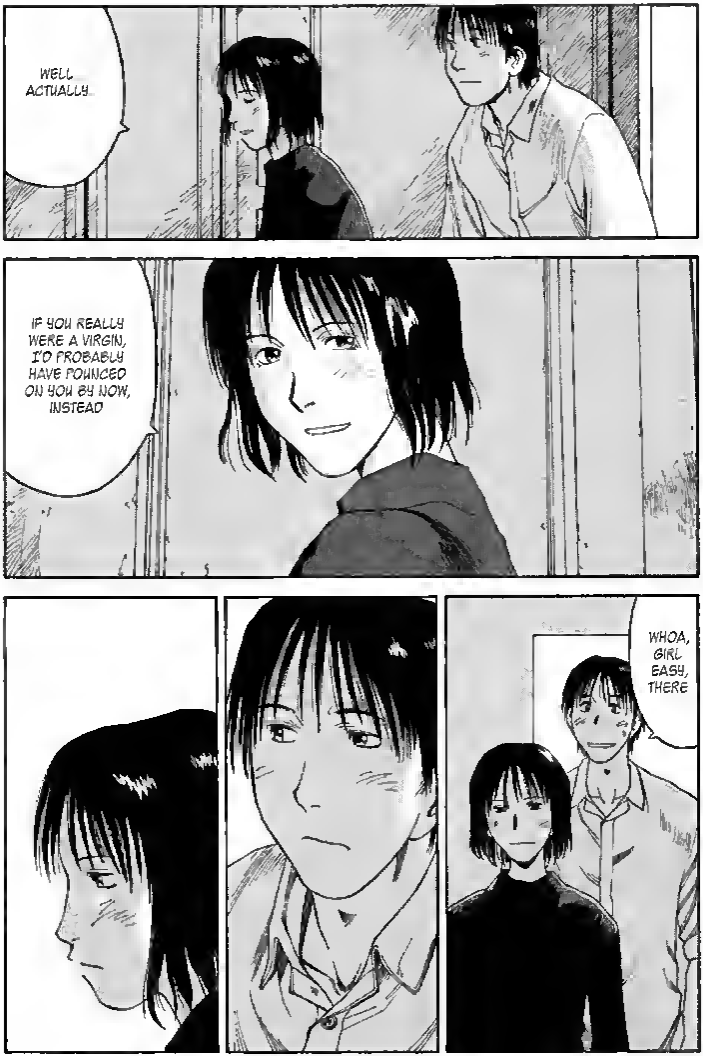
コポポ
MIND IF I HAVE A SMOKE?
WHOOPS, IT'S FULL OF FOAM AND SURE, GO AHEAD
JUST DON'T BLOW THE SMOKE AT ME, OKAY?
ROGER THAT
IT'S BIT-TER
Phew

MAYBE I PAMPERED HIM TOO MUCH BECAUSE HE SAID I WAS HIS FIRST
SOMA, YOU DRUNK?
A LITTLE
Heheh
HEY, YOU KNOW WHAT? THE FIRST TIME WE DID IT, KAWAI WAS SO NERVOUS HE COULDN'T GET IT UP
Ahahaha
HUH?
OH, OKAY
NOT BY A LONG SHOT
SO, UHH OUT OF CURIOSITY, WAS HE YOUR FIRST?

AND WHEN I SAW THAT WELL, YOU KNOW
SSRP
Whew
YEAH, BUT I'D NEVER BE ABLE TO TELL THIS TO SOMEONE IF I WAS SOBER
WHOA, OKAY, SOMA, YOU'VE DEFINITELY HAD TOO MUCH TO DRINK
BUT IF I'D KNOWN THINGS'D TURN OUT LIKE THIS, I WOULDN'T HAVE DONE IT.

YOU WANNA KNOW WHAT I MEAN BY THAT? I'LL TELL YOU.
FIRST, ONCE HE GOT A TASTE OF SEX HE NEVER STOPPED HOUNDING ME FOR IT.
SECOND, I FEEL LIKE I'M JUST KEEPING HIM OCCUPIED WITH MY BODY AND OUR RELATIONSHIP HAS GROUND TO A HALT.
AND THIRD, I KEEP THINKING THAT IF WE WERE GONNA BREAK UP ANYWAY... I SHOULD'VE NEVER SLEPT WITH HIM IN THE FIRST PLACE!
WOW.
I'M DRUNK.
I THINK
I THINK I SHOULD GO NOW
OH, UMM
YEAH, SURE
Aaaah

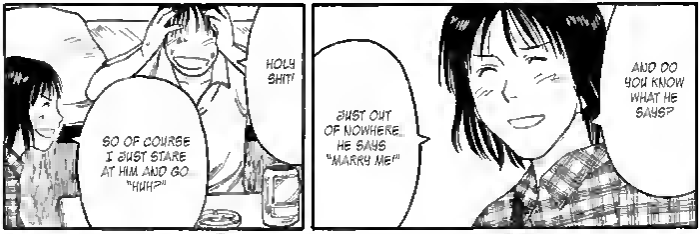
HAHA
YOU SURE YOU DON'T WANNA STAY THE NIGHT?
DON'T WORRY, I WON'T DO ANYTHING
MAYBE IF YOU WERE A VIRGIN I'D BELIEVE YOU, BUT NO
HAHA
I'M NOT NEARLY NAIVE ENOUGH TO BELIEVE THAT, SHIMA
IT'S LATE, SO AT LEAST LEMME WALK YOU HOME
WELL
SURE


WELL, ACTUALLY...
IF YOU REALLY WERE A VIRGIN, I'D PROBABLY HAVE POUNCED ON YOU BY NOW, INSTEAD
WHOA, GIRL. EASY, THERE

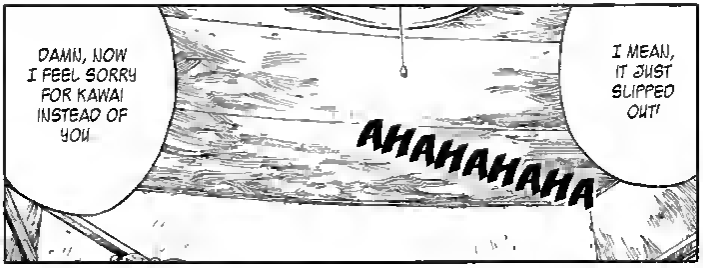
Same year,
July

SOME NEW HORROR I'M GUESSING?
YOU HAVE NO IDEA
OH, THAT'S RIGHT ARE YOU OKAY FOR ANOTHER ROUND OF COMPLAINING FROM ME?
SURE ANY TIME

OKAY, SO, HE COMES TO SEE ME IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT
WE'RE TALKING LIKE, ONE IN THE MORNING HERE
YEESH
I WAS SO SURPRISED I COULDN'T EVEN OPEN THE DOOR FOR A MINUTE...
HAHA YEAH

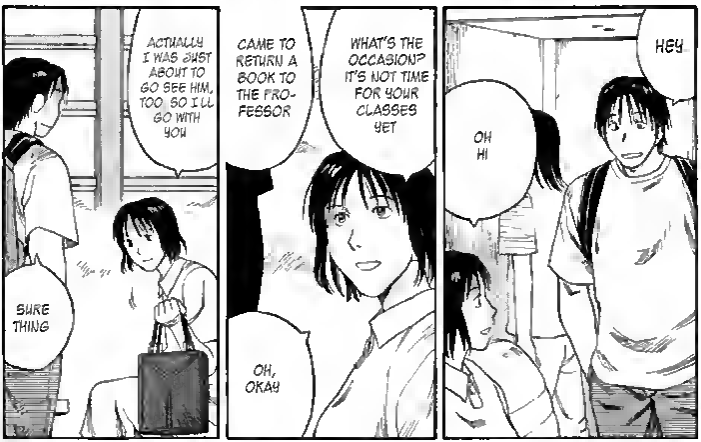

AND DO YOU KNOW WHAT HE SAYS?
JUST OUT OF NOWHERE... HE SAYS "MARRY ME"
HOLY SHIT!
SO OF COURSE I JUST STARE AT HIM AND GO... "HUH?"

UHH, WELL I'M SURE KAWAI REALLY GAVE IT A LOT OF THOUGHT BEFORE HE CAME TO SEE YOU
SO WHAT?! WHO JUST COMES RINGING THE DOORBELL ASKING FOR PEOPLE'S HANDS IN MARRIAGE?!
SO I SAID,
"HOW COULD I EVER MARRY A MAN WITH NO FUTURE LIKE YOU?!"

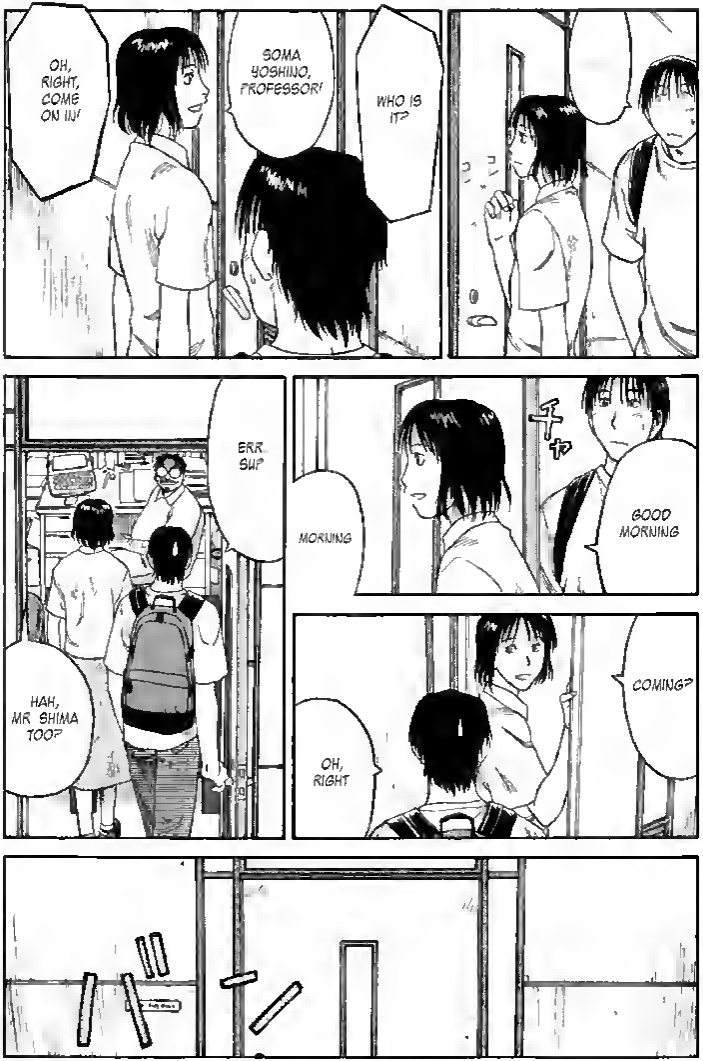

DAMN, NOW I FEEL SORRY FOR KAWAI INSTEAD OF YOU
AHAHAHAHA
I MEAN, IT JUST SLIPPED OUT!

HAHA WELL, I MEAN, THAT'S A PERFECTLY FINE CUP SIZE...
YEAH, I'M ACTUALLY SIZE B

SEE? SO IN THIS CASE, RE-IMBURSEMENT ISN'T NE-CESSARY
OH, YOU'RE RIGHT

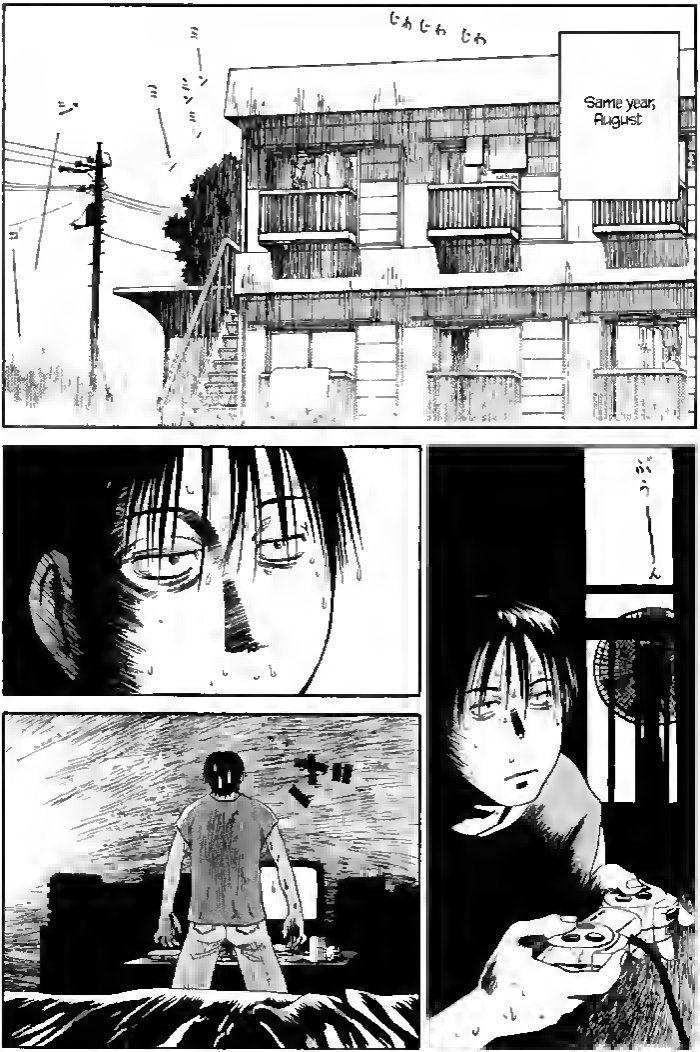

ACTUALLY I WAS JUST ABOUT TO GO SEE HIM, TOO. SO I'LL GO WITH YOU
SURE THING
CAME TO RETURN A BOOK TO THE PROFESSOR
OH, OKAY
WHAT'S THE OCCASION? IT'S NOT TIME FOR YOUR CLASSES YET
OH HI
HEY

BY THE WAY
HMM?
I BROKE UP WITH KAWA!
HUH...?
DID YOU
MHMM

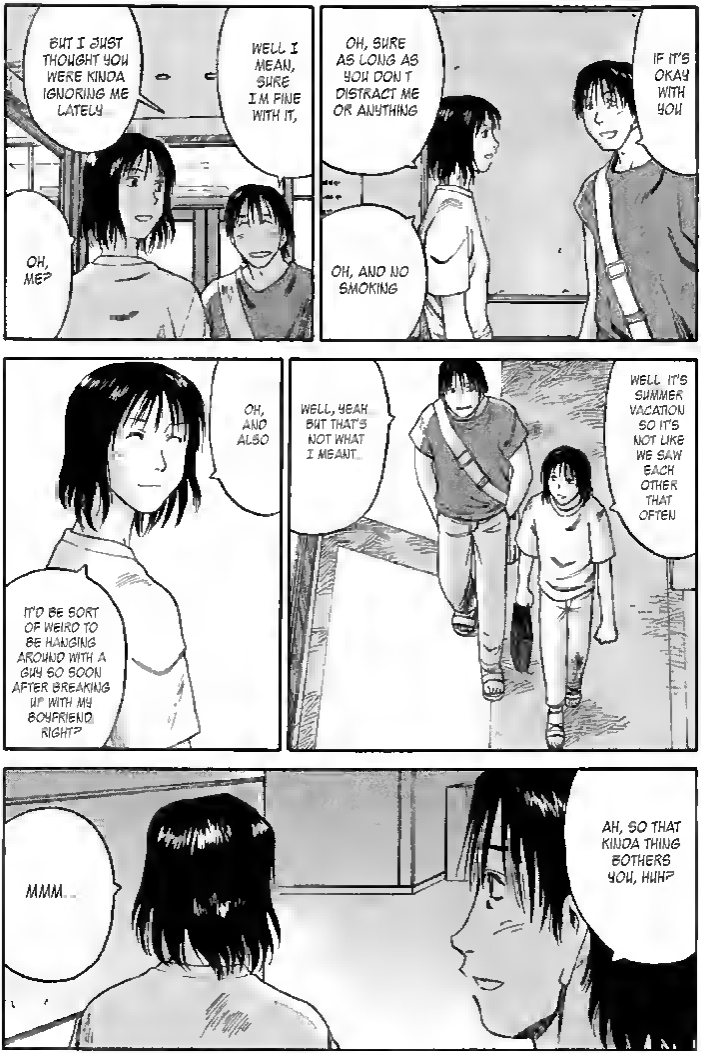

OH, RIGHT, COME ON IN!
SOMA YOSHINO, PROFESSOR!
WHO IS IT?
ERR, SIP
MORNING
GOOD MORNING
HAH, MR. SHIMA TOO?
OH, RIGHT
COMING?

WELL, I'M GOING BACK TO STAY WITH MY FOLKS FOR THE OBON FESTIVAL, BUT OUTSIDE OF THAT I DON'T HAVE ANY PLANS
I think I'll just do some part-time jobs
SO WHAT'RE YOUR VACATION PLANS?

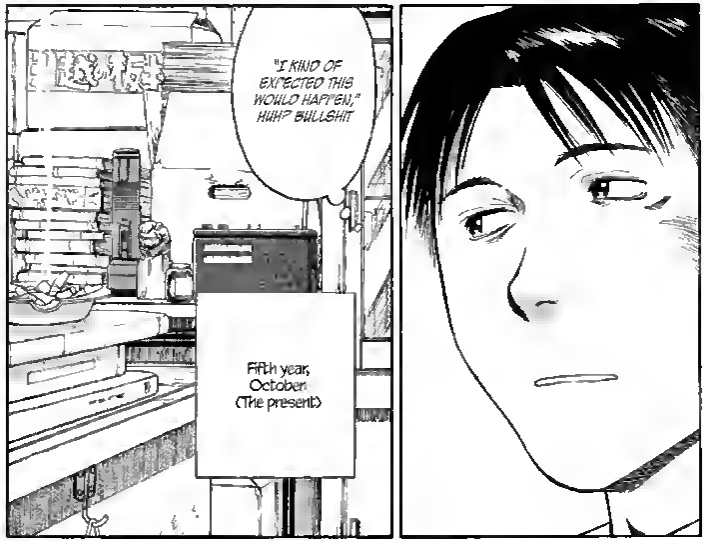
ALRIGHT, SEE YA
GONNA STAY THE NIGHT THERE, HUH? SERIOUSLY? DAMN, YOU LUCKY DOG
HELL YEAH
SUCKS TO BE YOU! I'M OFF TO TATEYAMA WITH NAOKO!
I
OH, HEY SOMA


Same year,
August

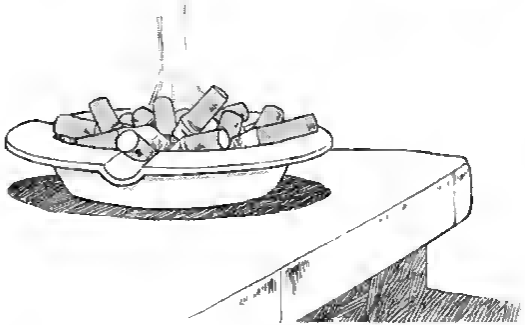
HEYA
HEY, LONG TIME NO SEE! DID YOU COME TO BORROW A BOOK?
AND NO, I'M HERE FOR THE AIR CONDITIONING
OH?
BUT IF ALL YOU NEED IS SOME COLD AIR, WANT TO COME OVER TO MY PLACE?
I have an air condi-tioner
UGH... SHOULDA KNOWN
WHAT? THERE PROBABLY AREN'T ANY SEATS LEFT BY NOW


BUT I JUST THOUGHT YOU WERE KINDA IGNORING ME LATELY...
WELL I MEAN, SURE I'M FINE WITH IT,
OH, ME?
OH, SURE AS LONG AS YOU DON'T DISTRACT ME OR ANYTHING
IF IT'S OKAY WITH YOU
OH, AND NO SMOKING
OH, AND ALSO
IT'D BE SORT OF WEIRD TO BE HANGING AROUND WITH A GUY SO SOON AFTER BREAKING UP WITH MY BOYFRIEND, RIGHT?
WELL, YEAH... BUT THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT...
WELL IT'S SUMMER VACATION SO IT'S NOT LIKE WE SAW EACH OTHER THAT OFTEN
MMM...
AH, SO THAT KINDA THING BOTHERS YOU, HUH?

YEAH,
IT DOES


"I KIND OF EXPECTED THIS WOULD HAPPEN," HUH? BULLSHIT
Fifth year, October (The present)

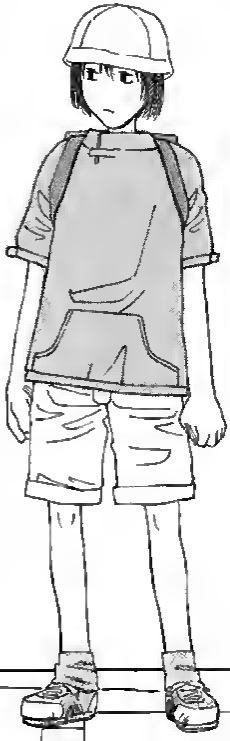
PLEASE COME IN
AH, SORRY TO KEEP YOU WAITING
ガチャ
AND SO I'M REALLY VERY SORRY, BUT, WELL...
WEEELL I JUST GOT OFF THE PHONE WITH THE MANA-GER
AND IN THE END WE BOTH AGREED THAT RIGHT NOW WE NEED SOMEONE WHO HAS PRIOR EXPERIENCE WORKING IN THE FIELD



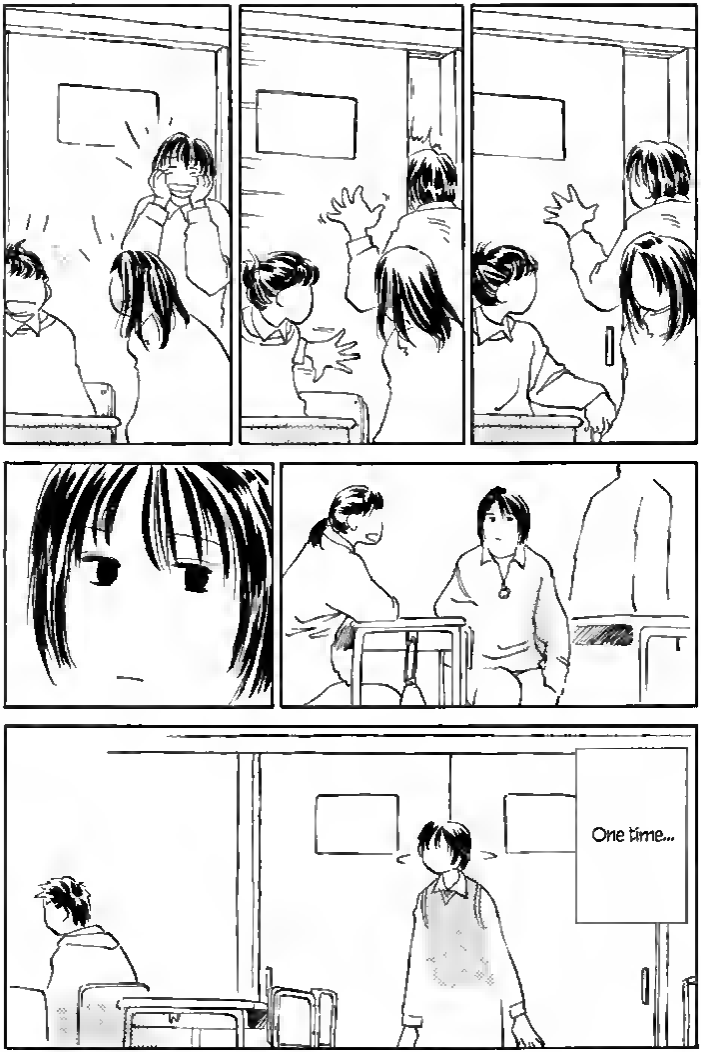
Chapter 18 - End

Things I Still Don't Know

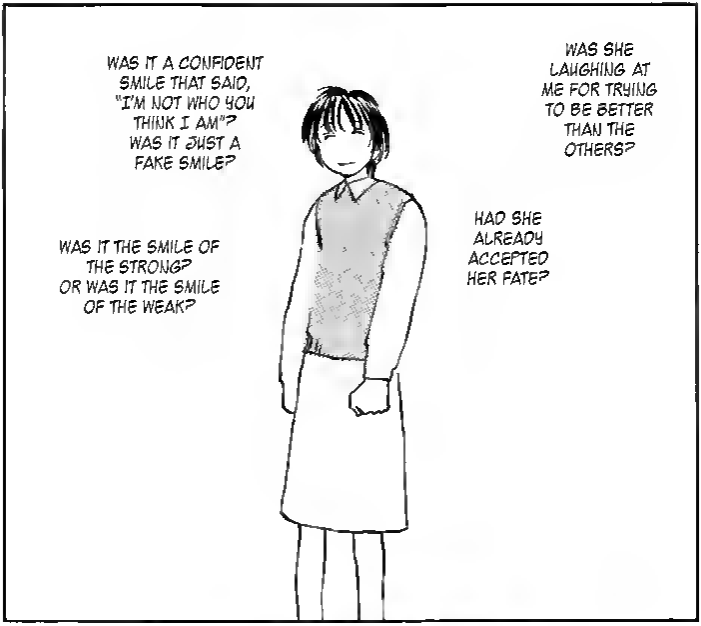
When I was in grade school...



There was a group of girls who were seen as more mature than the others.
And there was a little girl in our class who didn't quite fit in, and the cool girls would bully her.


One time...

WANT TO COME SIT HERE?
がらがらがら
WHY DID SHE SMILE AT ME THEN?


WAS IT A CONFIDENT SMILE THAT SAID, "I'M NOT WHO YOU THINK I AM"? WAS IT JUST A FAKE SMILE?
WAS SHE LAUGHING AT ME FOR TRYING TO BE BETTER THAN THE OTHERS?
HAD SHE ALREADY ACCEPTED HER FATE?
WAS IT THE SMILE OF THE STRONG? OR WAS IT THE SMILE OF THE WEAK?

and sometimes, when I'm studying, it still comes to mind.
I became an adult without ever learning what that smile meant,